

**Review of the pilot resettlement programme in the Republic of Korea**

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

**December 2017**



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## **PART I**

### **Executive Summary**

Under its pilot resettlement programme (2015 - 2017), the Government of the Republic of Korea (RoK) resettled 86 Myanmar refugees from camps in Thailand. Part I of this paper reviews and assesses how the selection, arrival, reception, and immediate integration process into Korean society was planned, implemented, and monitored. The review also seeks to identify good practices and lessons learned, which will contribute to further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the resettlement programme, should the Government of RoK decide to regularize and/or expand the programme.

There was a strong and striking commitment to welcoming and integrating these refugees from all stakeholders, namely the government officials, NGO partners, mentors, teachers, and employers. This dedication and commitment was strongly felt by the refugees, who openly expressed their conviction that their decision to come to Korea was the right one for them and their families.

As it is at the moment, government support to refugees appears to set “proficiency in Korean language” as the ultimate goal of “integration.” While there is no doubt that acquiring proficiency in the host country’s language is a core element for successful integration, it is also important to remember that refugees’ progress in integration must also be assessed against a number of dimensions, i.e., economic, social, cultural, religious, political and legal. Accordingly, the programme’s goal would need to be adjusted to help support refugees’ integration in those areas. Particularly strong emphasis needs to be placed on supporting refugees’ independence and their long-term aspirations.

Although the review was undertaken in a relatively short time after the refugees started to live in the host city, it was observed that all the adults were employed except mothers with small children who are managing their new home. Resettled refugees were helped by mentors assigned by the Incheon Immigration Office as well as by volunteers from the Korean Red Cross Society. Resettled refugees were satisfied with their children’s schooling and felt safe in their new homes.

There are a number of good practices in RoK’s pilot resettlement programme that should be highlighted.

First, the pilot resettlement programme (2015-2017) was carried out under Article 24 of the 2013 Refugee Act, which explicitly authorises admission of resettling refugees into Korea. The programme is therefore founded on solid and clear legal grounds.

Second, the RoK already had abundant experience from the social integration programme offered to migrant workers and marriage migrants. The design of the pilot resettlement programme benefitted from this experience. For example, the Incheon Immigration Office tapped into existing resources and networks that support migrants in Incheon City, managed to identify employers willing to recruit refugees, and reached out to NGOs supporting migrants to expand their existing programmes to include refugees.

Third, the Incheon Immigration Office developed a network of mentors who helped resettled refugees not only in continuing Korean language learning but also to respond to questions and/or concerns that may arise in day-to-day life. The involvement of ordinary citizens in supporting refugees in their local area also had a positive effect on the community's sense of responsibility sharing. The network of mentors, in addition to the volunteers from the Korean Red Cross Society, has the potential to expand.

Fourth, the Government saw the importance of continuing the Korean language lessons for resettled refugees beyond the initial six-month integration support at the Immigration Reception Center (IRC).

There are challenges and potential areas for improvement as well. The review found out that the main concern for resettled refugees is financial hardship due to the high cost of living. Another is having little time for family and social life. Working adults have six-day work schedules, work overtime, and have full-day Korean language lessons on Sundays. For working adults with small children to care for, they work overtime to feed the family and therefore have no time to study the Korean language. If they do not improve their poor Korean language skills, they will have no possibility for promotion and thus remain in low wage employment with very long hours and no time for self-improvement.

In schools, teachers report difficulties in communicating with refugee children and their parents. Additional support at the work place and at schools [through on-the-job training and the assignment of extra staff] would greatly enhance the initial stage for refugee integration. Such investment at the beginning of their integration phase is particularly important to enable those refugees to cope with life and strive in the Korean society.

There is no doubt that the Republic of Korea has proven that it has the commitment, the capacity, and the resources to make a larger contribution to resettlement. The expansion of the programme, however, would require more support from the general public in building a welcoming environment. More needs to be done to raise awareness, engage civil society, and improve the understanding of the resettlement programme among the general public.

#### Key Recommendations:

##### Selection Criteria

- In selecting candidates for resettlement in the RoK, put more emphasis on the refugees' legal and/or physical protection needs and specific vulnerabilities related to age, gender, and mental and physical conditions (in particular, survivors of violence/torture, women and girls at risk, children and adolescents at risk, and medical needs).

##### Initial support upon arrival

- Consider providing the initial six-month integration support to newly-arrived refugees in the urban community where they will eventually settle down rather than at the IRC.
- Map existing resources and support services in prospective settlement cities prior to arrival of refugees.

#### Support in the settlement city

- Provide additional support at work places, e.g. additional resources for on-the-job training.
- Allocate extra staff/teachers at school to ensure smooth transition to new environment.
- Encourage and support activities that preserve refugees' own cultural identity and language.
- Introduce a more holistic approach to support refugees' independence and their life aspirations.
- Initiate life planning from the beginning of the integration process and gather full information of each individual refugee, including his/her work experience and aspiration for life.

#### Structure, coordination, and required resources

- Based on mentor arrangement in Incheon, replicate, expand coverage, and institutionalize the practice, e.g. involve individuals and communities willing to support future expansion of the resettlement programme.
- Make use of existing Resettlement Working Group to discuss substantive issues relating to social and economic integration of refugees with the involvement of different Ministries, Municipalities, and NGOs.
- Establish a coordination mechanism at District level among relevant actors and service providers to avoid or minimize potential gaps and duplications.
- Consider allocation of necessary budget directly to the relevant regional Immigration Office and the District Offices to cover administrative and operational support necessary to ensure that quality services are provided and better coordinated among various stakeholders.

#### Looking forward

- Develop a communication strategy to enhance broader public understanding of resettlement programme and the role that the RoK Government plays therein.
- Align the assistance and support provided to individuals with different status, i.e. resettled refugees, Convention refugees, and humanitarian status holders, to make these uniform and standardized.
- Develop necessary mechanisms to facilitate family reunification of refugees (including resettled refugees) and humanitarian status holders.

## I. Introduction

Under its pilot resettlement programme (2015 - 2017), the Government of the Republic of Korea (RoK) resettled 86 Myanmar refugees from camps in Thailand. In PART I, this paper reviews and assesses how the selection, arrival, reception, and immediate integration process into Korean society was planned, implemented, and monitored. The review also seeks to identify good practices and lessons learned, which will contribute to further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the resettlement programme should the Government of RoK decide to regularize and/or expand the programme. PART II of the report will look into various elements that need to be taken into account for regularization and expansion of the resettlement programme as well as different options to be considered by the RoK Government for other possible pathways.

Over the past 65 years, resettlement has provided millions of people with protection as well as an opportunity to build new lives for themselves and their families. Through resettlement, States demonstrate the concrete expression of a commitment to refugee protection and to the promotion of human rights. It is also a practical manifestation of international solidarity and responsibility-sharing.

At the end of 2016, a global record of 65.6 million people were forced to leave their homes by conflict and persecution. Out of that number, 22.5 million were refugees outside their home country (17.2 million refugees of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and another 5.3 million Palestinian refugees registered by United Nations Relief and Works Agency, or UNRWA).<sup>1</sup> In 2017, UNHCR projected that some 1.2 million refugees are in need of resettlement as a durable solution, which represents a substantial increase in number compared to five years ago (859,300), due mainly to the Syria crisis as well as protracted refugee situations in Africa.<sup>2</sup> Although more than thirty countries are currently providing new homes to refugees<sup>3</sup>, the total number of refugees who benefit from the resettlement programme amounts to less than 1% of the total refugee population. With the increasing number of displaced populations worldwide and those who are in need of resettlement as durable solution, UNHCR has been calling on States to initiate/expand resettlement programme, and to consider initiating other humanitarian pathways programmes, particularly for Syrian refugees.

The Government of Republic of Korea (RoK) launched a resettlement pilot programme in 2015 for a duration of three years. Under this pilot programme, 86 Myanmar refugees hosted in border camps in Thailand have been resettled in Korea, in three batches.

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<sup>1</sup> "Figures at a glance", UNHCR website, <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/figures-at-a-glance.html>

<sup>2</sup> "Frequently asked questions on resettlement", UNHCR website, <http://www.unhcr.org/56fa35b16>

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the Republic of Korea, the following countries currently offer resettlement / humanitarian admission: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Rep. of Korea, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Uruguay, and the United States of America. <http://www.unhcr.org/56fa35b16>, p.7

At the end of the pilot phase, UNHCR and the Ministry of Justice in Korea agreed that it was opportune to review the implementation of resettlement to Korea, with a view to assessing lessons learned and contributing to the decision-making process by the Government of RoK on the future of the programme.

## **II. Purpose of the review**

The purpose of the review is set as follows:

- Examine the design, development and implementation of the pilot resettlement programme, with focus on its rationale, objectives, opportunities, and constraints;
- Gauge the appropriateness and effectiveness of the mechanisms established and the national and local support made available in achieving the overall goal of a durable solution for resettled refugees;
- Identify lessons learned, good practices, gaps, and constraints of the pilot programme;
- Provide recommendations to enhance efficiency and strengthen the fundamentals for sustainable resettlement programmes should the Korean government seek to regularize and/or expand it; and,
- Explore in what possible manner the Korean government may develop “complementary pathways” and suggest necessary steps towards developing such programme(s)<sup>4</sup>.

## **III. Methodology**

Methodologies used in the review included a desk review of relevant background materials to the Korean pilot resettlement programme, meetings with key stakeholders, questionnaires distributed to relevant stakeholders such as school teachers and Korean Red Cross volunteers, and interviews with resettled refugees.

Meetings were held with government officials at the capital, local government officials, and service providers in the Municipality of Incheon, Immigration Reception Center (IRC) staff, school teachers, employers, NGOs and civil society members who have been supporting the resettled refugees, as well as Karen community members and refugees themselves. While most of the interviews were conducted in person in Korea, some interviews were carried out on Skype or through the distribution of questionnaires, due to

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<sup>4</sup> Given that this review’s primary focus is to assess the RoK’s experiences in carrying out the pilot resettlement programme, it does not explore in detail the various possibilities for community and NGO partners to be involved in future resettlement activities. (Part II of this paper only provides some ideas for consideration.) Such a full “scoping” exercise in the RoK would be useful in gauging the interest and the resources that exist in civil society, which may contribute to the development of different admission programmes of refugees in the future.

the fact that they were outside the RoK or were not available during the author's visits to RoK.

Resettled refugees from the first group (22 refugees) and second group (34 refugees) have been making a living on their own for more than a year and for four months respectively. From those groups of persons, each adult refugee was interviewed using a set of guiding questions. They were advised of the confidentiality of the information and the identity of each individual (see Annex II). For conducting the interviews, UNHCR solicited the support of a Karen-English interpreter who had previously worked as UNHCR staff in Thailand/Myanmar border camps.

For the third group of 30 refugees, interviews of each family (adults) were conducted at the IRC with the support of an interpreter with a Karen ethnic background.

#### **IV. Korea's resettlement programme: Its framework and programme design**

##### **Background**

The factors that contributed to the decision by the Republic of Korea (RoK) to initiate a refugee resettlement programme were manifold. First, the RoK's increased engagement in humanitarian affairs over recent years: in the past decade, the support of RoK to the work of UNHCR has increased considerably. RoK's annual financial contribution towards UNHCR has quadrupled from 2012 to 2016, making it the 15th biggest donor to the organization. In 2016, the Government's contribution reached more than 20 million USD and RoK became a member of so called '20 million club' of major donors to UNHCR. With the increased engagement with UNHCR's work, the decision to initiate the admission of refugees into the RoK was, in a way, a natural progression of the country's striving for an increased role in the global arena including the international humanitarian sphere. Refugee admission was considered one of the viable options to demonstrate international solidarity and responsibility-sharing in the protection of refugees.

Second, there was the solid legal basis introduced in the 2013 Refugee Act. On the domestic asylum front, the RoK became a state party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol in 1992. The Government started accepting asylum applications in 1994. Since then, the number of asylum-seekers has steadily increased, with 7,542 applications being submitted in 2016<sup>5</sup>. In 2016, while Pakistan, Egypt, China, Kazakhstan, and Bangladesh were among the top five countries of origin of asylum-seekers, the backgrounds of asylum-seekers is quite diverse, representing some 72 countries. By the end of 2016, 655 persons have been recognized as refugees and 1,051 persons have been granted humanitarian status. The top five countries of origin for recognized refugees are Myanmar, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Pakistan, and the Democratic

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<sup>5</sup> Pakistan, Egypt, China, Kazakhstan and Bangladesh were among the top five countries of origin of asylum seekers in 2016.



Republic of the Congo. Among the humanitarian status holders, the topmost country of origin is Syria.

A major opportunity arose when the Refugee Act was developed and promulgated in 2013. The introduction of the Refugee Act in RoK was attributed to an initiative taken by a parliamentarian who made all the efforts to make the asylum law as comprehensive as possible. He not only saw the need for RoK to have a comprehensive asylum law but also had the foresight to include authorisation for refugee resettlement in the Act. The initiative was put in motion and took a windfall of support from the Parliament leading to the passing of the Refugee Act in 2013. Thus the country had a firm basis to initiate the resettlement programme as part of the implementation of the Refugee Act.

Third, looking around in the Asian region, the neighbouring country of Japan had initiated its pilot resettlement programme in 2010 as the first country in Asia to do so. Japan's programme caught the attention from the Government of RoK which carefully studied how Japan planned, developed and implemented its pilot resettlement programme. Japan's programme provided a good basis on which the Government of RoK could build their own programme, taking into consideration the lessons learned from the neighbour's experiences.

In October 2014, the Government of RoK carried out a public hearing on the "Refugee Resettlement Plan" and made a field visit to Thailand. While assessing the feasibility of initiating such a programme in the country, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) organized the first consultation meeting of "Working Group on Resettlement" in January 2015, consisting of 11 entities altogether, including Government entities, international organizations, municipalities, the Korean Red Cross Society and NGOs. Following such consultations, the matter was brought up to the Foreigners Policy Committee chaired by the Prime Minister, which approved the implementation of a resettlement pilot programme plan on 3 April 2015. In the meantime, the Government of RoK also participated in the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) in June 2015, an annual gathering of resettlement countries, NGOs, and other relevant partners on resettlement, organized by UNHCR HQs, where RoK government officials had a chance to learn from traditional and other emerging resettlement countries on how to develop a resettlement programme. By August 2015, Government developed an operational guideline for the resettlement programme that provided detailed guidance on each step of the resettlement process.

In the meantime, UNHCR supported the Government's efforts to prepare the grounds for the resettlement programme, by facilitating the Government's study missions to established resettlement countries, translating resettlement-related information, including UNHCR's Resettlement Handbook into Korean language, organizing workshops to discuss resettlement, which all contributed positively to the establishment of the pilot programme in the RoK.

## **Legal framework**

While establishing a legal framework to admit refugees is one of the key components in initiating a resettlement programme, developing a legal and policy mechanism is important to ensure that resettled refugees are provided with a secure legal status and access to rights, including access to naturalization.

In the RoK, the Refugee Act forms the basis for the admission of the resettled refugees, on the basis of which the “Implementation Plan for accepting refugees for resettlement” was approved by the aforementioned Foreigner’s Policy Committee.

Among others, Article 24 of the Refugee Act of 2013 stipulates:

Article 24 (Acceptance of Refugees Seeking Resettlement)

(1) The Minister of Justice may permit resettlement in the Republic of Korea of refugees seeking resettlement, after the Foreigners Policy Committee reviews the size of the group seeking resettlement, their region(s) of origin, and whether they can be accepted in accordance with Article 8 of the Framework Act on the Treatment of Foreigners Residing in the Republic of Korea. Permission for resettlement shall be deemed recognition of refugee status pursuant to Article 18(1).

(2) Details including requirements and procedures for resettlement permission in the country in accordance with paragraph 1 shall be stipulated by the Presidential Decree.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Following the adoption of the Refugee Act, the Enforcement Decree of the Refugee Act was enacted, in which resettlement-related issues are further regulated in Article 12 as follows:

Article 12 (Permission for Refugee Resettlement)

- (1) The conditions to grant resettlement for a refugee who wishes to resettle in the Republic of Korea under Article 24(2) of the Act are as follows:
  1. The person shall not fall under the grounds for non-granting of refugee recognition described in Article 19 of the Act;
  2. The person shall not be deemed threatening to the safety, social order or public health of the Republic of Korea.
- (2) The Minister of Justice may, if deemed necessary, receive a recommendation from the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees to permit resettlement for a refugee who wishes to resettle in the Republic of Korea.
- (3) The Minister of Justice may dispatch RSD officers, etc., to a designated location in order to conduct research concerning whether a resettlement refugee meets the conditions required for resettlement in Korea under Paragraph 1.
- (4) If the Minister of Justice intends to permit resettlement for a refugee wishing to do so, the Minister may arrange health examinations and basic adaptation training for such person prior to granting resettlement permission.
- (5) The Minister of Justice shall permit the settlement of resettlement seeking refugees in Korea via procedures for entry permission under the Immigration Control Act.
- (6) In addition to the matters described in Paragraph 1 through Paragraph 5, other necessary matters concerning settlement permission for resettlement seeking refugees shall be regulated by the Minister of Justice.

Article 24 (1) stipulates that resettled refugees will be given refugee status upon arrival and will enjoy the various associated rights, in accordance with Chapter 4 of the Refugee Act, which includes:

1. Same treatment for social security and other provisions as Korean nationals (Art.31);
2. Basic livelihood security (Art.32);
3. Guarantee of education (Art.33);
4. Social integration programme, including but not limited to, Korean language education (Art.34).

The Enforcement Decree of the Refugee Act goes further and stipulates that a recognized refugee will be entitled to receive “social integration education” (Art.14) as well as vocational training (Art.15).

A “Letter of Understanding (LoU) between the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Korea and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the resettlement of refugees to the Republic of Korea” was concluded on 1 July 2015 to set out the institutional framework for cooperation and collaboration between the two parties in the process of implementing the resettlement programme. This LoU sets out the modalities of the selection process, departure arrangements, reception, integration, protection of personal data, and the role of UNHCR in the different stages of the process.

The RoK is the only country in the Asian region that has a stand-alone refugee law that clearly stipulates the rights and the obligations of asylum seekers, those granted humanitarian status and refugees, and covers all major areas concerning protection of those persons. For the sake of durable solutions and successful integration, Government of RoK went further and generously provided extended support to those resettled refugees, such as providing assistance for employment opportunities and access to Korean language training.

### **Republic of Korea’s experience in receiving foreign residents**

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 3% of the total population in South Korea are foreign-born, which includes migrant workers, marriage migrants, international students, business owners, etc.,<sup>7</sup>. As of September 2017, the number of foreign residents stood at 2,062,973.<sup>8</sup>

Due to an aging society and acute labour shortages in recent years, RoK’s foreign-born population has sharply risen since the 1990s. In 2007, the UN officially declared the Republic of Korea as a migrant receiving country: a shift from being a migrant source

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<sup>7</sup> From IOM Korea website. <https://www.iom.int/countries/republic-korea>

<sup>8</sup> Immigration Statistics.

[http://www.immigration.go.kr/HP/COM/bbs\\_003/ListShowData.do?strNbodCd=noti0097&strWrtNo=235&strAnsNo=A&strOrgGbnCd=104000&strRtnURL=IMM\\_6070&strAllOrgYn=N&strThisPage=1&strFilePa th=imm/](http://www.immigration.go.kr/HP/COM/bbs_003/ListShowData.do?strNbodCd=noti0097&strWrtNo=235&strAnsNo=A&strOrgGbnCd=104000&strRtnURL=IMM_6070&strAllOrgYn=N&strThisPage=1&strFilePa th=imm/)

country.<sup>9</sup> The number of foreigners in the RoK grew over the years, surpassed 1 million in 2007 and reached 2 million in 2016. Among these, more than half a million are temporary laborers and approximately 150,000 are foreigners residing in the RoK as a result of marriage to South Korean nationals.<sup>10</sup>

Unskilled migrant workers come to the RoK from a wide range of countries, including other Asian countries such as China (predominantly ethnic Koreans), Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines and also from Uzbekistan, Kirghizstan and beyond. Migrant workers are engaged in agriculture, fishery and service industries, including auto-parts manufacturing, construction, metal work, textiles, furniture-making etc.<sup>11</sup> They are found largely in the industrial suburbs of Gyeonggi Province, such as Siheung and Ansan.<sup>12</sup> Most of these migrants are expected to return to their home country before their visa expires, as they are normally allowed to stay in the RoK for four years and ten months. Re-entry to the RoK by those persons is possible but with conditions, which are often difficult to overcome.

In addition to the migrant workers who fulfill low-wage jobs that Koreans have shunned, there is a large number of international marriage migrants – mostly foreign women marrying Korean men<sup>13</sup>. In the past, those international marriages took place in the rural areas where there was a shortage of brides. Currently, those from Vietnam, China (including ethnic Koreans), and Japan are the top three countries with marriages to Korean nationals.<sup>14</sup>

The Government of RoK has, over the years, established a support system to those foreign residents so as to smoothen their integration into society, particularly for those who were married to Korean nationals and children of such marriages. It should be highlighted that it is the Korean Immigration Service (KIS) of the MoJ that has been designated the responsible government entity for social integration of those persons. Under the Director General of Nationality and Integration Policy of the Korea Immigration Service (KIS), there is a Division specifically responsible for immigrant integration. As for refugees, the Refugee Division, which is also part of KIS, is mandated to oversee social settlement

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<sup>9</sup> As many as 2 million Koreans are said to have migrated from RoK to other countries such as the United States, Germany and the Middle East as farmers, miners, and nurses. “Immigration to South Korea”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration\\_to\\_South\\_Korea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_to_South_Korea), accessed on 9 November 2017

<sup>10</sup> Immigration Statistics, op. cit.

[http://www.immigration.go.kr/HP/COM/bbs\\_003/ListShowData.do?strNbodCd=noti0097&strWrtNo=235&strAnsNo=A&strOrgGbnCd=104000&strRtnURL=IMM\\_6070&strAllOrgYn=N&strThisPage=1&strFilePa th=imm/](http://www.immigration.go.kr/HP/COM/bbs_003/ListShowData.do?strNbodCd=noti0097&strWrtNo=235&strAnsNo=A&strOrgGbnCd=104000&strRtnURL=IMM_6070&strAllOrgYn=N&strThisPage=1&strFilePa th=imm/)

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Eungi Kim, “Demography, Migration and Multiculturalism in South Korea”, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Volume 7, Issue 6, Number 2, January 29, 2009, <http://apjif.org/-Andrew-Eungi-Kim/3035/article.html>, accessed on 9 November 2017

<sup>12</sup> “Immigration to South Korea”, op cit.

<sup>13</sup> ‘international marriage migrants’ is defined as “migration within countries and across borders due to marriage”, <http://eige.europe.eu/rdc/thesaurus/terms/1284>

<sup>14</sup> “Immigration to South Korea”, op.cit.

support for refugees, among other tasks. KIS therefore is not only dealing with immigration control but also engaged in planning and implementation of smooth integration of foreign residents into the Korean society and the staff members of the KIS are rotated among different positions so that they would be engaged in different aspects of migration issues in a holistic manner. They have a long history, experience, and expertise of providing assistance and support to those who came to South Korea with the intention of settling down.

## **V. Admission of refugees through resettlement: Selection criteria and procedures**

### **Selection Criteria**

The above-mentioned “Implementation Plan for accepting refugees for resettlement” comprised the RoK Government’s three key decisions on the pilot resettlement programme to be rolled out as follows:

- 1) RoK will carry out a pilot programme from 2015 to 2017 and monitor the progress. The outcome of the monitoring of the process will then feed into the decision-making process of whether or not to proceed with a regular resettlement programme;
- 2) RoK will target refugees from Myanmar, who are residing in refugee camps in Thailand and are in need of protection; and,
- 3) RoK will accept no more than 30 refugees in family units/year. The family unit was considered to include “head of family, spouse, children, parents, single brothers and sisters.”

According to the Government of RoK, UNHCR’s selection criteria formed the basis for selecting candidates. As this was the very first time for the country to implement the resettlement programme, they also paid particular attention to other elements as well. The Government put an emphasis on the integration possibilities, i.e., the refugees to be admitted under this programme are likely to adapt well to Korean society and to be employed. For example, RoK’s gave priority to admit families rather than single persons. The RoK Government considered that refugees in families were likely to better adapt to the new environment because of family support, whereas an individual or single person, in an entirely new society and without the sufficient tool and language to survive, would likely encounter more challenges. Also, extended family members, e.g. siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and other relatives, were not excluded entirely but were considered, on an ad hoc basis, on the condition that the applicant and his/her spouse should be able to support them, so as to ensure the stable settlement and social integration of those persons into Korean society.

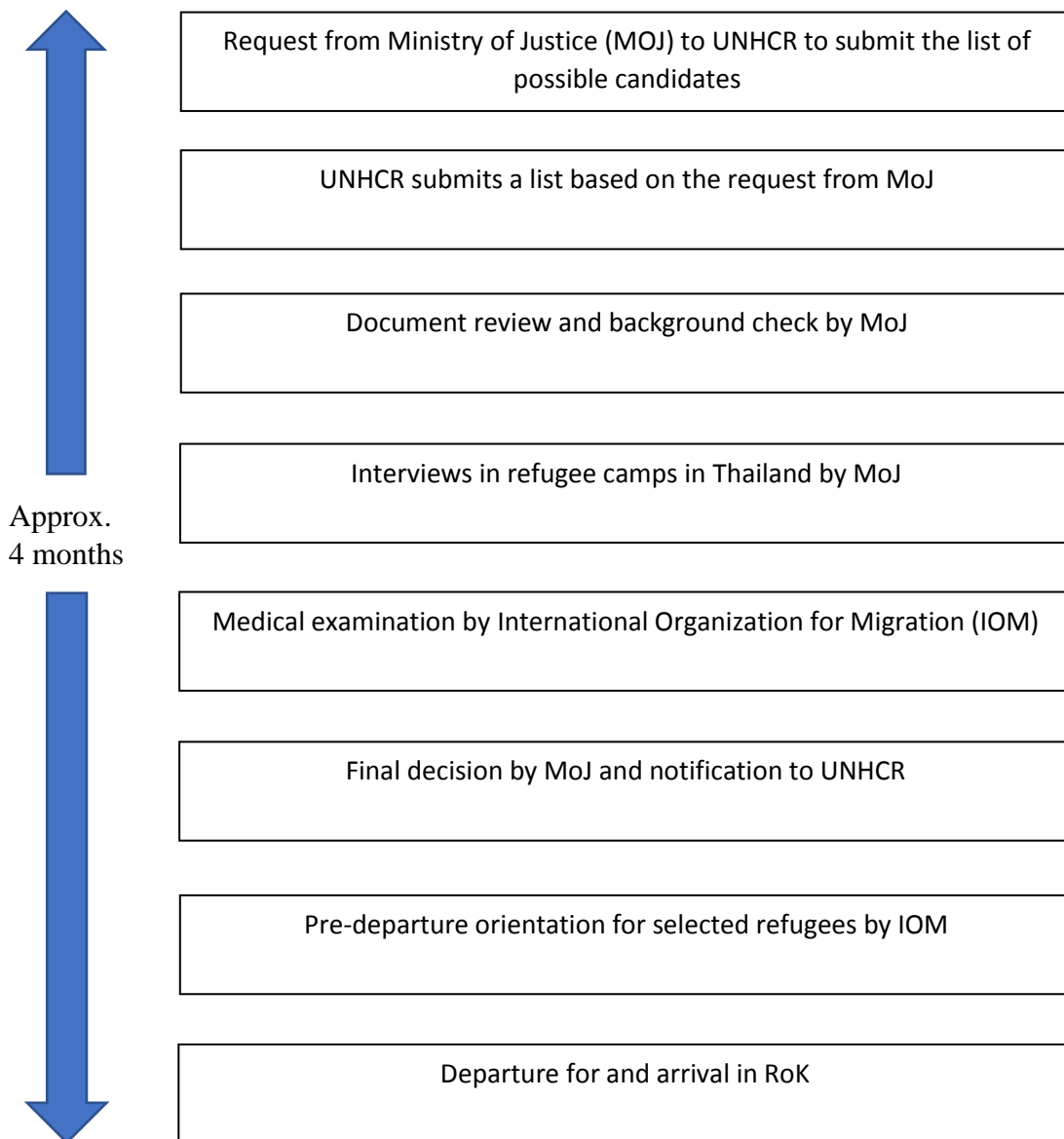
As to the target group, the Government’s main consideration was to admit refugees who would have a greater potential to blend into Korean society. A smooth implementation of the pilot programme being the priority for the Government, the admission of Asian

refugees was deemed more appropriate. As far as the ethnicity of refugees was concerned, whereas there were no restrictions for refugees who belong to different ethnic minorities, the Government initially focused on Karen ethnicity. For the third group, though, a family of mixed marriage (Karen and Rohingya) was included.

**Procedures**

In terms of the process, chart 1 explains the flow of the selection process.

Chart 1: Selection process



First, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) requests that UNHCR submit a list of candidates for their consideration. On the basis of such an official communication, the UNHCR office

in RoK contacts the UNHCR office in Thailand with a request to prepare a list of suitable candidates.

Upon receipt of an official request from the RoK Government, UNHCR Thailand generated a database and identified possible candidates who may match the criteria proposed by the RoK. They then individually approached refugees and asked for interest. According to UNHCR Thailand, this process was difficult in the first year, for mainly two reasons. First, Korea was not very well known as a resettlement country among the refugee community and not so many refugees had direct links to Korea through the presence of relatives or friends from the same community. Second, although many of them had earlier expressed their desire to resettle, particularly to the United States of America, the US group resettlement programme had already been closed by then. In the meantime, with the somewhat positive political developments in Myanmar, the majority of refugees preferred to remain in the camp to wait and see if and when return to their home country might become possible, rather than actively seeking resettlement opportunities in other countries.

*"I used to watch Korean movies in the camp. I knew "Good Morning" and "I love you". When we were told that we would go to Korea, I was so excited."*

- A female refugee

While some of the refugees mentioned that they did not know anything about Korea, others mentioned that they knew about the country through Korean movies that they used to watch in the camp. Korean movies and K-Pop stars were also quite popular among refugees

in the camps, and some had even picked up Korean phrases. As refugees became more aware of the resettlement possibility in Korea and thanks to the positive feedback from the first group on the life in Korea, receiving a confirmation of refugees' willingness to resettle in Korea became easier to secure from the second year.

Almost all the refugees cited the same reasons for why they wished to resettle. While the positive developments were reported in their home country, there was a big uncertainty if and when return to Myanmar might become a reality. For them, there was no opportunity to establish themselves in their country of asylum. Furthermore, they were increasingly facing difficulties in coping with life in camps, as the rations had been reduced over the years. Able-bodied men had to leave the camp and work in the plantations and construction sites as seasonal workers, but many were recruited for cheap labour and constantly had to hide from the police and the military patrolling the area to control irregular migration. Among others, what worried them most was their children's future. Apart from the fact that they have been residing in a refugee camp for a prolonged period of time and dependent on the international humanitarian assistance, children had little access to quality education. When they were offered the possibility of going to the RoK, therefore, they were so delighted and excited. Although some refugees mentioned that their relatives and friends had questioned their decision, citing the situation in the Korean peninsula, they still believe they made the right decision in coming to the RoK.

Once the list was provided and shared, MoJ conducted a document review and background check (as per Art. 24 of the Refugee Act). A selection team was formed by MoJ, with the participation of the IRC staff who were to coordinate the programme in the initial six months upon arrival, and a field mission was carried out to physically meet and interview refugee candidates.

Following the interviews, a physical examination was conducted by IOM. Once the refugees were ascertained to be in good physical condition, the final decision was made by MoJ on whom to accept for resettlement. The decision was then transmitted to the UNHCR office to inform each candidate family in the camp.

Just before their travel to the RoK, a pre-departure orientation session was organized and provided to the selected families at the Processing Center in Thailand. At this Center, refugees bound for the RoK spent three days for final departure preparations including orientation on life in Korea (climate, geography, culture, language, education, employment, rights and law, cultural adaptation etc.) and what to expect immediately upon arrival. The orientation included information on how to travel by air (as this would be the first time that the refugees would experience this) and what are things they can bring and weight limitations. The pre-departure cultural orientation materials and curriculum used were those prepared by the RoK Government, based on the research conducted by and the training materials of IOM. 15 hours were allocated to such sessions, which were arranged and provided by IOM Thailand.

*“Everything was done too fast at the Processing Center in Thailand. I would have liked to learn at least some greetings in Korean before coming to Korea.”*

- A female refugee

According to the refugees, while a booklet on Korea was distributed at the pre-departure orientation session, they were only able to flip through it and were not able to acquire much information from it, due to the

limited time available. Many refugees also mentioned that they would have liked the opportunity to learn some basic Korean language, such as greetings, at a minimum. They would also have liked to learn more about Korean culture and manners, which they considered basic preparation before arriving in the country. On this point, it was explained by the Government that as the refugees were going straight to the Immigration Reception Center (IRC) where a comprehensive six-month long post-arrival cultural orientation is to be provided, the focus of the pre-departure orientation session was only to provide the information covering their immediate needs, (e.g. dos and don'ts while in the plane), as the time in the Processing Center in Thailand was limited. If the resettlement programme is to be regularized in the future, however, the review and reinforcement of the pre-departure orientation session may be considered. When considering the revision of the contents of the orientation session, it would also be



important that there is a clear linkage between the pre-departure orientation session and the cultural orientation that will be provided upon refugees' arrival.

The first group of four Karen families of 22 persons arrived on 23 December 2015, followed by seven families of 34 persons in 2016, and five families of 30 persons in 2017, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Total</b>
No. of families	4 families	7 families	5 families	16 families
No. of adults	9 adults	17 adults	11 adults	37 adults
No. of children	13 children	17 children	19 children	49 children
Total No. of persons	22 persons	34 persons	30 persons	86 persons
Ethnicity	Karen	Karen	Karen and Rohingya	
Settlement city	Bupyeong, KyunGi Province	Bupyeong, KyunGi Province	Still at Immigration Reception Center	

While the selection criteria were rigidly established and limited to basically nuclear families (young couples of working age and their children) so as to ensure that they would become self-reliant relatively easily, MoJ has shown flexibility in considering positively those who may not necessarily fit the criteria. This has been shown through the inclusion of a principal applicant's relative and the acceptance of a person with disability. In the former case, the Government agreed to accept the inclusion of a niece. She had been staying with the family in a refugee camp for an extended period of time and had been raised as though she were one of his children. She was therefore considered to be emotionally, socially, and economically dependent on the family. In the latter case, the RoK Government agreed to accept an applicant who had a prosthetic leg due to a landmine accident and his family. Furthermore, while the RoK Government has mainly been taking refugees of Karen ethnicity, they have also shown flexibility in admitting a mixed marriage couple (Karen and another ethnicity of Muslim background) for the third group. These practical flexibilities shown by the RoK Government should be commended, as they are in line with the principles underlying resettlement and UNHCR's selection criteria, which focuses on protection consideration and vulnerability.

Although such flexibilities have thus far been shown, the questions asked in the selection interviews still appear to ascertain whether the concerned refugee candidate shows determination and commitment to working hard. This demonstrates how the focus on "integration potential" continues to underline Korea's selection process. There appear to be two reasons as to why becoming self-reliant is considered a priority: first, as previously explained, the Government considers that only with the initial success of the

programme will there be public acceptance for its continuation and possible expansion. Second, according to MoJ officials, in order to accumulate successful cases, refugees need to show that they are prepared to study the Korean language and achieve other integration related goals. Should they fail to do so, they would not be able to live a “normal” life as other Koreans do. This statement may be the reflection of cultural traits, how success is measured in the RoK, and is the general paradigm for what is expected of refugees upon arrival.

As an emerging resettlement country, it is understandable that the Government remains cautious and places emphasis on being able to present successful cases. Nevertheless, as resettlement is considered a priority for refugees with specific protection risks and vulnerabilities, this review highly recommends that the Government consider putting more emphasis on the following selection criteria, among others, 1) legal and/or physical protection needs; 2) survivors of violence and/or torture; 3) medical needs; 4) women and girls at risk; and 5) children and adolescents at risk.<sup>15</sup> It would be important to note that the vulnerabilities which lead refugees to be in need of resettlement are not necessarily permanent vulnerabilities but issues that are resolved by resettlement i.e., detention, lack of access to medical treatment, lack of support to single parents, etc.

It should also be highlighted that having vulnerabilities does not necessarily mean that refugees do not possess integration potential. On the contrary, such refugees possess the determination and will to become self-reliant and can contribute to the new country with their skills and resources. What is most appropriate would be instead to employ an empowerment approach in supporting their integration, as refugees are able to stand on their own feet once given the opportunity and supported appropriately.

In terms of target groups, it would also be important to consider global resettlement needs and to match the RoK’s intake to where these needs exist the most. UNHCR normally shares such information at the Annual Tripartite Consultation on Resettlement every year.

#### Recommendations:

- In selecting candidates for resettlement in RoK, put more emphasis on the refugees’ legal and/or physical protection needs and specific vulnerabilities related to age, gender, and mental and physical conditions (survivors of violence/torture, women and girls at risk, children and adolescents at risk, and medical needs, in particular).
- Determine the target groups on the basis of the global resettlement needs.

## **VI. Support for settlement of resettled refugees**

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<sup>15</sup> For details, see UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, UNHCR, 2011, pp. 245-296, [http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=search&docid=4ecb973c2&skip=0&query=handbook resettlement](http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=search&docid=4ecb973c2&skip=0&query=handbook%20resettlement).

### **Initial period upon arrival**

Upon arrival, resettled refugees are welcomed at the Immigration Reception Center (IRC), which was established in 2014 to accommodate both asylum-seekers and resettled refugees. Because of its location in a remote area which is not easily accessible from the city center, only those asylum-seekers who have financial difficulties choose to stay at the Center, while their application for refugee status in Korea is being processed. The duration of their stay is normally limited to a maximum of six months. Asylum seekers at the IRC have the opportunity to study the Korean language during their stay at the IRC.

Resettled refugees are also accommodated at this center, in principle, for the initial six months upon arrival, where they will spend most of the time attending different classes and lessons. First of all, resettled refugees will undergo an intensive Korean language course, which is identical to those offered to migrant workers and marriage migrants. They are organized according to the Korean Immigration and Integration Programme (KIIP), which is designed and implemented by MoJ through its Social Integration Division for foreign residents. The programme focuses on Korean language training and understanding of its culture and society. The free of charge language programme consists of 0 to 5 levels and those who have passed the final exam for Level 5 are exempted from the language test for naturalization. Most of the resettled refugees have completed Level 0 and 1 during their stay at the IRC and they may continue at the next level upon relocation to the city.

Second, refugees also have an opportunity to learn Korean cooking and undergo “musical therapy” sessions, which are designed to support persons with traumatic experiences, re-establish their life in society, and enhance adaptability to a new environment. In addition to the weekly programme, the IRC organizes “field trips” to the city and shows them the city life that awaits them in a few months’ time. As their departure from the IRC approaches, they visit prospective apartments, learn how to use different electric appliances and/or gas, how to use the ATM, and how to do grocery shopping at a supermarket or a shopping mall, where to find emergency exit routes, common customs of living respectfully in close proximity to neighbours in apartment buildings, and emergency procedures (eg. how to use a fire extinguisher).

For their religious activities, the IRC arranges for a Korean pastor to come and organize a service every week for Christians. For Buddhists, refugees are free to visit nearby temples. For Muslims, the IRC has designated a room as a Muslim prayer room, which is used by Muslim asylum seekers residing at IRC and is also planning to arrange a visit to a mosque for Muslim individuals as part of their field visits, as there are Muslim refugees in the group which arrived this year.

Just before they are discharged from the IRC, the resettled refugees are introduced to “mentors” who will support their life in the new environment. In the first year, four mentors (one mentor per family) were selected from the pool of immigration volunteers who worked at the Incheon Immigration Office. From the second group, two mentors

were assigned to each family and visited the family at least every Saturday to help the family with their Korean language lessons. Those mentors were also expected to help the family whenever the need arose. (See more discussion on mentors in Chapter “Living in cities: After 180 days”)

The first group of refugees stayed at the IRC for nine months and the second group for eight months. According to IRC staff, they, in coordination with the Headquarters of the Korea Immigration Service determines the duration of refugees’ stay, taking into consideration the readiness of refugees to start a new life and other external factors. For the latter, the seasonal factor (starting a new life in the middle of the winter will be too difficult for refugees), school year (the new school year starts in March), and the availability of jobs and apartments were the main considerations.

During their stay at the IRC, the RoK Government provided an equivalent amount of monthly allowance to each household (a little less than 500 USD / person/ month). As refugees would not normally require such money while they are provided with accommodation, meals, and other necessary items at the IRC, this would become their savings when they moved out of the IRC and started a new life in the city. In fact, such savings were intended to supplement the rental deposit after two years when the Government’s assistance is terminated. For some families who decided to move to another apartment after one year, this saving was of great help, as the rental deposit in Korea could easily amount to 1 million KRW (approx. 1,000 USD) and the refugees would not have saved such an amount in one year.

A systematic interview with each refugee family was conducted three months after their arrival but even before such an interview, an IRC coordinator always made an effort to talk to refugees on a daily basis, keep a close eye on their welfare, and deal with any issues that may arise during their stay. From a refugees’ point of view, MoJ and the IRC are their mother and father, and they feel grateful for the services provided during their stay. They mentioned that there was no time that they felt their needs were not met. The only area for improvement that the refugees requested was the Korean food served to them. Most of the refugees mentioned that particularly in the beginning, it was difficult to appreciate Korean food because it was too spicy and they were not used to it. They mentioned that they understood the need for them to get accustomed to Korean food, as they were going to live in Korea from now on, but the change was too abrupt. Something which resembles their traditional dishes (normally they would eat rice with soup) would have been better. (The author understands that this issue was later on resolved.)

Most notably, many refugees mentioned that they are still in touch with IRC staff. Even after they moved to the city and were assigned mentors, some of them continued to turn to the IRC whenever they faced difficulties or had questions. The IRC staff were responsive to their needs and tried to help them as much as possible by facilitating contact with the assigned mentors or employers, or by providing advice. The IRC also tried to link the newly arrived group with those who had arrived earlier in the RoK, encouraging

them to provide tips to the new arrivals. The fact that refugees still showed a strong appreciation and emotional attachment to IRC staff reflects the growth of a close relationship during the initial period of the refugees' life in the RoK. There are, however, always downsides to such a close relationship. Although several months have passed since leaving the IRC, some refugees still request permission from the Center for many issues whenever they need to make a decision. The sense that the IRC is their guardian appears to be predominant in the minds of refugees, which may prevent them from making life decisions of their own free will.

*"Of course, it is good to have time to focus on learning Korean language at the Immigration Reception Center. But as a human being, sitting at the Center is not really good. We need to work. Working and studying at the same time would also be good."*

- A male refugee

The RoK Government, and particularly the IRC staff, made significant efforts to make the life of resettled refugees as comfortable as possible. They wanted to ensure that newly arrived refugees would have a smooth landing in the new country and not experience culture shock immediately upon

arrival. They also considered it to be more efficient for refugees to stay together in one place so that the service provider would have easier access to all the families in an equal manner.

The Center, however, is a highly protected environment located in a remote area, where refugees hardly have the opportunity to come into contact with the "real" life of Korea except for a few field visits and contacts with earlier groups. The refugees recall significant differences between life at the IRC and life in the city. At the IRC, all their needs were met, they were provided with basic orientation and language classes, and they were carefully guided through new Korean experiences. They stated that these lessons only registered superficially in their minds, as the new information they have acquired in the classes was not put in immediate use in the real life. When they finally went on to live on their own, they realized the challenges and importance of being able to understand basic instructions at work and communicating with peers, mentors, and neighbours. But by then, the basic language lessons were over and they were expected to be able to handle their life with minimum support yet in another new environment.

It is important to start considering the option of providing initial support to refugees in the cities where they will settle down. Such an approach has a number of benefits, as refugees will be immersed with actual life experiences from the beginning, they will have more opportunities to learn and practice the Korean language in real time, and may utilize the knowledge they acquired about the country's way of life. They will inevitably have contacts with Koreans through which they will have a chance to be acquainted with their neighbours, the civil society, and the District offices. Furthermore, it will minimize the number of moves that the refugees will have to make in terms of accommodation, thus reducing the stress of adapting to a new environment several times, including adapting to

new schools in the case of the children, in the first years of their stay in the new country. The capacity of the IRC is also limited to less than 100 and the Center accommodates not only resettled refugees but also asylum-seekers. This will obviously limit the number of refugees that the Government can accommodate at any point in time to around 50 to 60. Moreover, as it will be discussed in another chapter, the mentoring scheme established in the city appears to be working fairly well. With all the necessary support system already in place, more effective support which caters to the actual needs of newly arrived refugees would be possible. In fact, such approach has been used and favoured in very experienced countries such as United States, Canada or Australia.

On the question of whether and how long refugees should stay at the IRC, the Government explained that this matter was in fact brought up in meetings of the Working Group on Resettlement. In those meetings, NGOs referred to the example of migrant workers and mentioned that they often experience high level of stress living in the community. Such stress, according to them, could be avoided by staying at the IRC. From the Government's point of view, they considered it important for newly arrived refugees to retain fond memories of their first experience in the RoK. As a result, they came to the conclusion that the current practice to place newly arrived refugees at the IRC for the initial period of several months would continue.

In reality, the placement of newly arrived refugees would be dependent upon, for example, their past experiences before arriving in the RoK. Among those refugees so far admitted to the RoK, those who had past experiences of working outside the refugee camp had a much stronger preference for settling down immediately in the urban environment and starting work. Others, who had been dependent on the assistance provided by the international community, felt that life at the IRC was comfortable and the environment was quite similar. Should the target groups of future resettlement programmes include those refugees with life experiences in an urban setting, it would be more appropriate to provide the opportunity for them to start their new life in the city without having to undergo a transition period at a reception center.

In terms of monitoring, it is also noteworthy that the RoK Government invited a national NGO (pNan, meaning "Refuge" in Korean) that had been providing legal counselling and livelihood support to asylum-seekers and refugees in Korea to conduct interviews and provide feedback on the way that government assistance is provided to refugees. Their recommendations included the following: first, they highlighted the importance of providing support to keep their own cultural identity, in addition to the support for getting accustomed to Korean culture and practices; second, they suggested that the type of accommodation provided to refugees should be something that they can afford to pay after the financial support by the Government is no longer available. Those identified by the Government for the first group were placed in apartments rather at the high end and it was found to be beyond refugees' financial means once they had to carry the monthly rent themselves. Those recommendations have been positively taken into account by the Government and soon after changes were made in the provision of support. After

refugees leave the IRC, pNan visits refugee families and introduces other people who are interested in helping them. The practice of inviting a third party to assess the programme is a good practice and this is one of the areas where the Government-civil society cooperation may be further sought.

#### Recommendations:

- Depending on the background and the past experiences of refugees, and particularly for those with an urban background, consider providing the initial integration support to newly-arrived refugees in the cities where they will eventually settle down.
- Prior to the refugees' arrival, map out the existing resources and support services in prospective cities where refugees are likely to be hosted.
- Continue the involvement of NGOs and civil society in assessing the implementation of the programme in the future.

#### **Employment**

In addition to organizing daily activities for resettled refugees at the IRC, one of the major objectives of the IRC staff is to look for potential employment opportunities for the refugees.

IRC staff initially faced challenges in looking for appropriate employment for refugees. After exploring various opportunities, taking into account that most of the refugees had no previous employment experiences and their beginner's level in Korean language, manual jobs happened to be the most appropriate sector for refugees to find work. For the first group, and with the help of the Ministry of Labour, IRC staff contacted a number of factory owners. Many of them were not forthcoming and did not agree to providing employment opportunities to the newly arrived refugees.

The IRC, with the help of the Incheon Immigration Office, then contacted some members of the "Integration Policy Committee," which was originally formed to discuss migration-related issues in Incheon city. As this Committee has been positively engaged in some activities for migrant workers and/or multicultural families in the past, one of the members who owned a factory agreed to consider employing refugees. With his support, another factory owner agreed to take in other refugees.

According to this Committee member and factory owner, he used to watch the children of migrant workers playing in the neighbourhood and was concerned about their welfare, as their parents were often busy with work and had no extra time to spend with the children. He then invested money in building a center where such children could gather, play, and study while their parents were away. This employer who has already employed migrant workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Uzbekistan, agreed to employ them and provide on-the-job training.

For the second group, some of the adult refugees were absorbed by these two factories, which agreed to take on more refugees. With an additional owner who also agreed to provide work to, there are currently three factories that employ resettled refugees. At the time of this writing, out of 26 adult refugees, 20 refugees were working.

According to the employers interviewed for this review, the refugees were, as compared to other migrant workers, a little slow in learning new tasks but followed instructions sincerely. They got along with their peers from different

*“What I like most here is that there is no discrimination at my factory. I eat lunch with my co-workers and I observe that everybody respects each other.”*

- A male refugee

nationalities and in one of the senior managers' words, “They make the atmosphere very pleasant.” While their productivity may be low in the beginning, there are already some refugees among the group who have shown potential for acquiring more advanced skills and thus been given more important tasks at work. For those refugees, employers commented that they may be eventually trained to become engineers in the long run.

The employers also see a benefit to employing resettled refugees and investing time and resources into building their capacity, as they will permanently stay in Korea. One of the senior managers of the factory specifically stated that they would very much like to receive more refugees for those reasons, investing more in longer-term workers, like resettled refugees.

Factory owners not only provided extra time and effort for refugees to learn the job as quickly as possible, but also provided additional financial support to those refugees who were in need. For example, after one year of staying in an apartment that was provided by the Government, one of the refugee families decided to move to a new apartment. However, the rent was high and the owner personally decided to provide supplementary support for the housing cost.

The employment opportunities for resettled refugees were possible with the willingness of warm-hearted employers. The Incheon Immigration Office's approach to the Integration Policy Committee was an innovative and successful approach, as the Committee Members had an understanding of the issues surrounding migrant workers and their willingness to help out despite the fact that the company's productivity may be reduced, at least in the initial period of recruitment. At the same time, however, it is obvious that it will not be possible to heavily depend on those few willing factory owners to continue receiving refugees over the years.

The group of such willing employers must be expanded, not only in one sector but also in different types of jobs. Given the general positive statements that were made by employers, they were asked whether they would be willing to also share such positive comments with other factory owners to encourage possible recruitment of refugees. It appears, however, that the information that they are hiring refugees is rather kept to



themselves, as, according to the one of the employers, they regard themselves competitors and not friends of a circle, when it comes to recruitment of workers.

*“As my Korean has improved, I have been given an additional responsibility at work to show newly arrived refugees how to work. I am very happy to help those new people. My supervisor does not have enough time to coach new workers so I am happy to help my supervisor, too.”*

- A female refugee

When asked what would constitute their basic requirements for them to employ more refugees, the first request of these employers was to prepare them with basic competency in the Korean language. Without a certain level of Korean proficiency, it is difficult to

give instructions or even to know whether they have understood what they are expected to do. For this reason, the presence of the first group was of much help when the refugees from the second group were employed in the same factory in the following year, as the refugees from the first group were able to teach the newly employed refugees in their own language.

Another suggestion made by employers was to explain to the refugees the importance of working if they are to survive in Korea. It appears that some refugees were reluctant to work overtime in the beginning. However, when explained that overtime work would result in higher income and help ease the house economy, most of them understood the reasons why the owners made such suggestions and now work overtime, except some mothers who have small children at home. Generally, refugees work for an average of nine hours or more five days a week (very often until 2000 or 2100 hours), and may also work extra hours on Saturdays. It is very common for migrant workers to work overtime, as their families remain in the home country and daily family obligations do not arise. However, in the case of refugees, the situation is often different. This review found that because resettled refugees have six-day work schedules, work overtime and have full-day Korean language lessons on Sundays, they hardly have time for family and social life. The issue of long working hours is closely related to the issue of how refugees' life in RoK should be planned and supported in the longer term. This will be further discussed in Chapter VI. Long term planning/future.

There are two factors that contributed to the success so far of refugee employment:

First, the successful employment rate (all those who want to work are engaged in gainful employment) is made possible thanks to the committed and proactive coordinator who is assigned to the post at the Incheon Immigration Office. His previous portfolio was to look after the social integration of foreign residents. He had already seen the necessity of building a network of individuals who are engaged in activities in relation to multicultural families and migrant workers. He was steadfast in approaching such persons with a view to establishing a network of prominent persons in the city from various areas of profession. When the initial efforts to find suitable employment for the refugees was not successful, he approached factory owners with an established status with

a request to consider providing employment. The responses were positive and the refugees secured employment. The employers continue to be understanding of the background of the refugees, which is different from other migrant workers and provide extra support.

Second, there were willing employers, who saw the benefit of employing refugees. One of the employers mentioned that they would need to train refugees only once, as compared to other migrant workers whose stay in Korea is limited to less than five years and thus must keep on training new recruits. Those who have appreciated the experience of employing refugees seem to be open and positive to the idea of absorbing more refugees in the future. Notwithstanding all the positive feedback from the employers, the current situation depending on a small number of willing individuals has its limit, particularly if the programme is to be expanded.

The employment search has so far been successful in finding appropriate jobs for resettled refugees. The number of employers, variety of jobs, and locations for work, however, are still very limited. Efforts to identify appropriate employment for resettled refugees and to expand the network of employers need to be boosted for the new group and beyond. The Government, with possible cooperation from the Ministry of Labour, may reach out to companies, business owners, agricultural, fishery and animal husbandry, etc., that already employ (but are not limited to) migrant workers and solicit their willingness to employ refugees. Seminars and small workshops may be organized for this purpose, where feedback from current owners on their experiences of employing refugees may be shared with participants in addition to information on the resettlement programme. Ideally, those companies that are willing to consider employing refugees in the future may then be registered for future matching.

*"I received on-the-job training but only after I was assigned to the actual work. It would be good if we could receive such training before we start working, so that we know what is expected at work."*

- A female refugee

Moreover, in order to augment the employment search, the Government may wish to consider the provision of incentives to potential employers: refugees will undergo on-the-job vocational training at their places of future employment for a certain period of time (*e.g.*, for three to six

months) with financial support from the Government. To take an example from Japan, during this initial period, the focus would be to introduce the refugees to the work environment and teach them the necessary vocabularies that would be used at work with the help of interpreters. The refugees will then be introduced to the actual tasks they would be engaged in, with their working hours gradually increased to full-time. Typically, this arrangement continues for six months and the Government provides monthly income support to each family during this period. This arrangement has reduced the anxiety on the part of employers in employing refugees and also refugees in starting a new job in a totally unfamiliar environment.

From the first and second group, all men had secure and full-time employment at the time of the interview. Their salary was dependent on their productivity and the type of work they were engaged in. For women, on the other hand, particularly for those families with small children who have yet to go to a nursery school, most of them decided to stay home and take care of their children. Finding a nursery in RoK is said to be very difficult, and in many cases, new parents-to-be need to start the search even before the birth of a baby. As a result, six women are currently not working. Those who were working but expecting a baby may decide to quit their job due to the shortage of daycare arrangements. Refugees stated that they were aware of needing to survive with only one income and that they have to somehow manage.

This issue is closely related to the economic self-sufficiency of resettled refugees. When asked what their current concerns were, many refugees cited “income” or “house rent.” As in many situations, there is normally a high expectation that resettled refugees would send remittances to their relatives back in the refugee camps. The resettled refugees feel pressured to send money to their family, which very often creates additional financial strain on the family of resettled refugees in the new country. In particular, for a family with four or more children, the financial situation seems to be a constant challenge and they have asked whether more assistance could not be provided. In normal circumstances, people may opt to move to another job with a higher salary or aim for promotion within the same company. In the case of these refugees, their work experience in Korea was still limited and their Korean was not at a satisfactory level to enable them to compete with other Koreans. Looking for higher-paid jobs at another factory therefore did not seem to be a realistic solution at the moment. Career advancement in the same workplace, however, may be a feasible solution in the future for some refugees, as factory owners have started to invest in refugees who show potential by giving them more complicated tasks.

As many of those families with financial difficulties have small children to take care of and are therefore entirely dependent on the husband’s income, finding a solution that enables mothers to work, even part-time, would greatly enhance their house economies. Indeed, during the interviews, some mothers expressed their wish to find work but gave up on the idea because they have small children. Getting a slot in the day-care center will be highly competitive, but those who have small children or are expecting a baby do not even appear to be aware of the services provided by a day-care center or to have enquired about such an option. While providing timely advice on locally available day-care services is a necessary first step, consideration for alternative solutions (entrusting the care of small children to an NGO or a group of volunteers from the community with proper supervision and advice from an expert) would be highly recommended. In fact, one of the NGOs in Incheon is already engaged in such an activity (taking care of children with working parents as well as a mother-child center); the adjustment of their programme to include the care of small babies seems to be a possible option.

Recommendations:

- Introduce on-the-job training to newly-arrived refugees for them to have an opportunity to learn new skill and acquire associated Korean language.
- In order to augment the employment search for refugees, consider the following options:
  - 1) Consider the coverage of the cost of on-the-job training period to encourage employers to take on more refugees.
  - 2) Reach out to potential employers through dissemination of information and organization of workshops and seminars so as to create/expand a pool of willing companies and business owners.
  - 3) Explore different daycare options for small children, particularly babies, so as to enable mothers to find work, with possible financial support from the Government.

### **Living in cities**

Once the resettled refugees move out of the IRC, the main coordination work to oversee the day-to-day integration process will fall under the jurisdiction of the Incheon Immigration Office. For both the first and the second group, as the place of work and residence was determined to be in Bupyeong, Gyeonggi Province, the Incheon Immigration Office became the designated office to prepare for the refugees' arrival and to monitor the progress of their integration. The coordinator had abundant experience in taking the lead for the social integration of other migrants in the region and had a wide network.

Most importantly, the Incheon Immigration Office had an overview of different support programmes for migrants in general, which made it easier to design the programme for resettled refugees. Be it the policy committee on migrants in the region, NGOs that have long been offering services and supporting migrant workers and their families or those foreigners married to Korean citizens, the Bureau tried to incorporate refugees into those existing programmes, rather than creating a parallel structure specifically dealing with resettled refugees.

The Incheon Immigration Office tactfully used the existing network of local "Integration Policy Committee," a group of "prominent persons" who had already been committed to assist migrant workers. Through this network, the Incheon Immigration Office managed to identify willing employers. While this Committee normally discusses overall issues relating to migrants and their dependents, their support has also been solicited when additional resources are required to support resettled refugees.

Another initiative the Incheon Immigration Office took was to develop a pool of 'mentors'. Currently, there exist two types of individuals who support the integration of resettled refugees at the local level. One is the group of 'mentors' who were selected and recruited by the Incheon Immigration Office. Another is the group of volunteers of Korean Red Cross Society. For the latter, utilizing a nation-wide network of volunteers who are assigned to each district, Korean Red Cross Society, at the request of the Incheon

Immigration Office, assigned their own volunteers to help out the refugees who settled down in the district of their responsibility. Red Cross volunteers were assigned to each resettled refugee family under the “emergency assistance” programme in which they normally provide livelihood assistance to individuals in their district. Those individuals are considered to be in need of material assistance (elderly persons, female heads of household, as well as asylum-seekers, Convention refugees, and humanitarian status holders, etc.). They provided household items in their new apartments when refugees first arrived in the city and visited refugees’ houses and delivered material assistance when they saw the need. Although not strictly within their responsibility, Red Cross volunteers initially accompanied refugee school children to and from school and also brought them to a hospital when refugees got sick, delivered supplies such as food and other materials, and helped whenever refugees encountered a problem such as fixing a clogged toilet, fixing a broken mobile phone, and showing them how to recycle bottles and cans etc. On the other hand, the mentors assigned by the Incheon Immigration Office were experienced immigration volunteers and were familiar with immigration-related issues. Those mentors do not receive any remuneration for their work but are provided with transportation costs when they arise. Many of them used to work at the Incheon Immigration Office, helping those migrants coming to the Immigration Office to renew their visas, enquiring about their status, etc. Others had earlier experience in supporting migrants and thus could apply their knowledge and experience to the situation refugees were in. Some others newly applied to the position when the Immigration Office circulated the information, asking for those interested in helping resettled refugees to apply for the position.

Initially, the mentors were to assist the refugees with the challenges they may encounter in day-to-day life. That role has been reduced with the contribution from volunteers from the Korean Red Cross Society (particularly material assistance). Thus, although those mentors recruited by the Immigration Office also initially provided needs-based assistance whenever the refugees faced challenges and asked for assistance, after several months, they decided to focus more on supporting Korean language lessons by reviewing the homework for the Sunday classes following discussions among themselves and with the Incheon Immigration Office. From the second group, the Incheon Immigration Office called on people who were willing to work as mentors with a specific focus on teaching the Korean language. In reality, though, the mentors also help out refugees with daily chores. They also go to their houses, whenever they receive a call from the refugee family, which may not be necessarily related to the

*“For visiting doctors, for paying the utility bills or when we do not understand the documents written in Korean language, we call our Red Cross volunteer. We take a photo and send it via mobile phone and she will explain the content to us.”*

-A refugee family

*“Whenever we have a problem, we call our mentor. He will come to our house even if it is late at night.”*

- A refugee family

Korean language issues. Who the refugees would call in case of emergency, seems to largely depend on the relationship so far developed between the refugee family and the mentor / the volunteer.

Those mentors and the Korean Red Cross volunteers appear to be highly appreciated by the refugees and some of them are in fact very attached to them. In one of the refugee's words, "Whenever we need help, we call the mentor and he is at our doorstep quickly to help us out." The involvement of ordinary citizens in supporting the integration of resettled refugees, through the development of such a network of mentors as well as the utilization of the existing Korean Red Cross volunteers is what the RoK Government considers one of the most positive outcomes of the pilot resettlement programme. According to them, those who have never been associated with supporting refugees domestically or overseas and were not even aware of the global refugee issues are now very proud of supporting refugees in their neighbourhood. The Government considers the resettlement programme to have created positive power in the community and could influence the overall perception of refugees and the future approach of the Government towards refugee admission.

From the mentors' point of view, this was the first time that most of them had been involved with supporting refugees. Most of them have professions, are very busy at work, and have not found the time to personally do something to help others. Those who were interviewed mentioned that they felt that they were contributing by doing something good in the local community and that they were extremely proud. Likewise, Red Cross volunteers are those who are interested in helping others in need in their own local area. The majority of the volunteers are housewives and are very familiar with the local resources available in the community. Although they may not normally be expected to do more than deliver emergency assistance, they have gone the extra mile to personally support resettled refugees. Some of them mentioned that resettled refugees are new to the country and therefore should be helped. In fact, there is a potential that such a network of supporters may gradually expand, as the number of those ordinary citizens who are involved in mentoring and volunteer work increases. There is already a similar programme in the UK where 'educational mentoring' system has been introduced and successfully implemented. This programme offers tailor-made educational mentoring opportunities to young refugees who need extra support with their education. Learning from similar good practices in other resettlement countries, the current mentoring network of Korea may be expanded in size and coverage.

Another issue that needs to be considered is the sustainability of the current network and systems in place. Many mentors appreciate the way the Incheon Immigration Office relate to them, which is participatory, inclusive, and creative. It is largely attributed to the personality of the person in the position and his relationship with different actors: he has been open, listened to different ideas, and was proactive in tapping on existing networks that he had also personally developed over the years. While bureaucrats in any country tend not to be good at thinking outside the box and going beyond the existing and

often rigid framework, the Incheon Immigration Office sought to make use of resources that already existed in the local community for multicultural families.

Furthermore, and amazingly, all these networks and the support system have been developed without any financial support from the central Government. For any financial requirements, the Incheon Immigration Office consults the Integration Policy Committee members and seeks their support. For the moment, all the needs that have arisen were covered by the contributions voluntarily made by Committee members. Also, for particular activities for refugees (*e.g.*, Karen language lessons, music lessons for Karen children), they sought support from NGOs that already had existing programmes for migrant workers, and concluded an MoU to formalize such a support mechanism.

This model could be replicated elsewhere as the number of resettled refugees gets larger and the different locations are to be selected for them to settle down. It would be useful to target some potential cities already in order to map out the existing resources and initiate consultations to build a network like the one in Incheon. The fragility of the Incheon system, however, lies with the fact that all the networking and building the system have been shouldered by one competent official and his proactive personal engagement. The concern was expressed by some supporters that many people currently engaged may withdraw their support if his leadership no longer exists once he rotates out from the position and is replaced by a typical “bureaucrat.”

Regarding the budget, the MoJ has started this programme with a bare minimum budget just to cover the cost for pre-departure medical screening and travel-related expenses. Although the budget was progressively increased every year, reflecting the actual needs of supporting refugees’ integration, the budget was meant to cover the expenses incurred at the stages of pre-departure, at the IRC, cost of accommodation, and their living expenses for several months (corresponding to the length of their stay at the IRC). No funds have been allocated to support the activities at the regional/local level after refugees left the IRC and started their life in a city. While the Incheon Immigration Office has done its utmost to develop a support mechanism for refugees, with creative ideas and existing resources, it is already obvious that “compassion fatigue” may soon arise, if only a few partners are always asked to contribute to the programme.

This review therefore proposes the following:

First, in order to preserve and further develop the current system, the central Government needs to support the relevant regional Immigration Office in areas where refugees are to be resettled by providing human and financial resources. With reinforced resources, Immigration Offices covering the cities which receive resettled refugees in the future could systematize the current system, while also expanding the network of willing and committed individuals in each city.

Second, while increasing the budget and allocating necessary funds to the local Government would be the top priority if the existing framework is to be maintained, the option of settlement in the city, instead of the IRC, from the very beginning of integration process may be considered a mid-term objective. As mentioned earlier, this option has a

number of benefits both for refugees and for the receiving country. It may be useful to do the cost calculation to see if budget savings may be created by using this option. Such savings may be re-allocated to provide the human resources to support refugees in the community and to reinforce the coordination mechanism at the local level.

#### Recommendations:

- Based on the good practice of the existing mentor system in Incheon, expand in size and coverage and institutionalize this network by involving individuals at community level who are willing and interested in supporting the future expansion of the resettlement programme.
- Map existing resources in other potential settlement cities and initiate consultations to building a network like the one in Incheon.
- Consider the allocation of necessary budget directly to the relevant regional Immigration Office and the District Offices to cover the administrative and operational support necessary to ensure that services provided are of quality and better coordinated among stakeholders.

#### **Accommodation**

The prospective apartments are identified by IRC staff while refugees stay at the IRC. When identifying the accommodation, “safe, secure, and affordable housing” is usually taken into consideration, which provides a base from which refugees will seek employment, re-establish family relationships, and make connections with the wider community. Recognizing that establishing a “sense of place” in the new country is a critical part of refugees’ rebuilding process, the IRC staff took into consideration not only the above three elements but also access to the presence of a Myanmar community, which was greatly appreciated by refugees. It facilitated their contact with other Karen community in Korea (*i.e.*, access to a support network offered by the same ethnic community).

While safe and secure accommodation was found for each refugee family, when it comes to “affordability,” some refugees soon found it difficult to remain in the same apartment for more than one year, when they had to start covering the rent through their own financial means.

It is the usual practice in RoK that the tenant would need to make a rental deposit, which is quite high (often reaching one million KRW or approximately USD 1,000 or more). As no refugees are expected to possess such a large amount of money, the Government covers the cost for the deposit and the monthly rent for one year. The rental deposit will be refunded by the apartment owner once the contract is over and the tenant moves out. The agreement is that the amount that the Government made for the rental deposit will be recovered by the Government when refugees move to another apartment at their own cost.



Two refugee families among the first group opted to move to another apartment after one year. As they would need to make a rental deposit from their own pocket, they utilized their savings in the bank account while they were at the IRC. Yet, the rent was still high compared to their income. To ease their financial situation, one of the factory owners decided to provide additional assistance by covering 100,000 KRW per adult. When looking for a new accommodation, refugees mainly had two considerations in mind: a less costly place and a location closer to the Burmese (and Karen) community. Both of them found new apartments closer to refugees from the second group with the help of their mentors.

#### Recommendation:

- When identifying suitable accommodation, in addition to three basic elements, namely, ‘safe, secure and affordable housing’, take into consideration proximity to work place and schools as well as ethnic community.

#### Education

Whenever refugees are asked why they decided to resettle in the RoK, they unanimously reasoned that it is for the education of their children. For this, they are happy to have come to the RoK, as it is known to be a country of high quality education. The parents have aspirations for their children to grow up and be educated as Koreans are.

*“We are so happy to see my children going to school. In the camp in Thailand, there was no school. My children talk about their dream to become a nurse, a soccer player and so on.”*

- A refugee father

While at the IRC, children attend classes at Incheon Hannuri school, or “Alternative school” in Incheon City. Hannuri school is a public school supported by the Incheon Metropolitan Office of Education (IMOE). It admits multicultural students (ie those from mixed Korean and foreign marriages) and children of migrant workers from all over the country. The school is free of charge at the elementary and junior high school levels. The curriculum of the school is 50 % national standard and 50 % specialized academic courses, focusing on Korean language classes and Korean culture. After attending Incheon Hannuri School for one year, students are expected to attend regular public schools.

*"We invited the parents to school in the evening. They were so impressed with their children's work in the class and looked happy. Parents were clearly motivated to work harder."*

- The teacher from Hannuri school

Resettled refugee children commute to and from Hannuri School by shuttle bus. Some of the junior and high school refugee students opted to stay in the dormitory of the school while they were at the IRC, and transferred to regular school when they moved

to the location of settlement. According to the teachers at Hannuri school, Karen children are well behaved and make a lot of effort in whatever is taught. They are calm and contribute to building a good environment in the classroom. The teachers praise them as role models.

After they moved to the regular school, their 'excellent' attitude was again specifically noted: as one of the teachers put it, "they are well behaved, follow the rules and are kind to their schoolmates." Particularly at the regular school where Korean children often do not have the opportunity to study together with children from different nationalities and culture, teachers mentioned that the presence of refugee students greatly helped other students understand the multi-culturalism which the school has been promoting. Teachers noted the positive impact that the resettled children brought to the school whereby other children started to show interest in knowing more about other countries and different cultures. Students in the school, in general, became more considerate and open to others from different background.

The biggest problem that almost all the teachers raised was communication. Because of the lack of Korean language proficiency, resettled children have difficulty in following the classes and their academic performance remains low. They cannot catch up with the pace of other students even if the teacher checks their school work individually to see whether the children have understood the subject. The teachers also expressed concern on the challenges in communicating with the parents. Effective parent-teacher communication is yet to be found for conveying necessary information and counselling. Often, the children miss much of homework, and as a result, they are left behind in the classes.

Teachers therefore requested that the Government arrange that there be someone who can assist in the class for their class work and also facilitate communication between teachers and children as well as parents. Although there are 'multi-cultural teachers' at these regular schools, it is the

*"Although my Korean is better than before, I am still not confident. The most difficult thing is to attend a PTA meeting at school."*

- A refugee mother

regular school teachers who are designated to promote multi-culturalism in addition to their ordinary teaching job and multicultural teachers are not specifically expected to take care of each and every child from multicultural background in the class. Moreover, there

*“As refugee children’s parents are still weak in Korean language, it is difficult to provide counselling or information. It would be good to have someone who can assist in the class for their class work (such as a working staff teacher in special class). I try to explain very slowly, but it takes too much time.”*

- A teacher at a regular school

seems no subsidy available to receiving schools which accommodate foreign-born children to allow them to employ extra teachers to offer individual or small-group instruction. The school teachers spend a lot of time helping them individually to make sure that they have understood the schoolwork but because of the communication barrier, there is a limit how much

they can do.

Two possible options may be considered. One is to extend the stay at Hannuri school to ensure that children’s proficiency in Korean language reaches the level where they are able to follow the class work in Korean. Another is to provide extra support for schools to employ one or more extra teachers or teaching assistants to look after individual children’s academic performance and school activities. It would also be necessary to engage an interpreter who will assist in facilitating communication between the teachers and the children as well as their parents. The author notes that migrant children are in the same situation, and there may be a concern that providing these additional support to refugees, despite their special situation, may be perceived as favouritism. However, it would be significantly important for resettled refugees to make a good start in their new life and their children get the support they need in school so that they will be equipped to strive in their life in the longer term. The experiences in many other resettlement countries show that such initial investment will pay off at a later stage, as there will be cohorts of children who are coping well in school and would be able to take up all kinds of opportunities as young adults.

In addition to formal schooling, Incheon Immigration Office facilitated resettled refugees access to additional opportunities for children and mothers. One is being offered by a national NGO called JUAN, which provides a class once a week after school for primary school children so as to reduce the hours that they would need to stay alone at home, while they are waiting for their parents to get back from work. JUAN also offers different programmes for the mothers with children under 3 years old at the Health and Family Support Center, run by the Ministry of Women and Family. The Center is open to anybody regardless of their nationality. It provides cooking lessons and other programmes to cater to the needs of clients. This programme provides an opportunity for Karen mothers to meet with Korean mothers and make connections.

Five mothers from among the non-working refugee mothers from the first and the second group are participating in the programmes and they all expressed their desire to take additional Korean language classes. As they did not have any extra money to cover the cost of a teacher and a room, the Immigration Office decided to cover the payment. On the part of the mothers, they decided to take turns to look after children when they are

participating in the language class. Although this arrangement was discontinued due to the move of some of the families to another place, this is another good example of collaboration among different stakeholders. The uniqueness of this example lies in the fact that the refugee mothers themselves also took the initiative to start a programme to allow maximum number of participation of refugee mothers.

Another NGO called “Social Cooperative ‘Eoulim Ikeulim’ offers ocarina class and Karen language lessons on Sundays. ‘Eoulim Ikeulim’ was founded by an airline company retiree who was exploring the possibility of starting something meaningful after his retirement, using his long international experience. He was aware of the challenges migrant workers in Korea were facing: not only in learning the new language but also their struggle to preserve their own culture and mother tongue. While he was convinced of the importance of multiculturalism, the understanding in the society was not so widespread. With some friends and other members of the same church who shared the same objective in life, they started ‘Eoulim Ikeulim’ to promote multiculturalism in Korea. They go out and provide lectures at different schools on multiculturalism and training sessions on mental control and anti-violence. In their office, ‘Eoulim Ikeulim’ provides Korean language lessons to migrant workers and their families. It also arranges other language lessons such as Russian, Chinese and Vietnamese. Occasionally, ‘Eoulim Ikeulim’ organizes theater plays involving migrant children to promote public understanding of multiculturalism.

Before the arrival of Karen refugees, the Incheon Immigration Office consulted several NGOs which were looking after migrant workers and their families. ‘Eoulim Ikeulim’ was ready to offer Karen language lessons but lacked sufficient funds and human resources. The Incheon Immigration Office then consulted JUAN which had extra budgetary space and proposed that three parties, i.e. JUAN, “Eoulim Ikeulim,” and the Incheon Immigration Office conclude a Memorandum of Understanding to help support the programme to teach Karen language, with the refugees themselves teaching. Although the Karen refugees are not professionally trained to be language teachers, involving refugees themselves in organizing the activities is a good practice of empowerment and such endeavours should be encouraged more in the future. In fact, as the refugees advance with their Korean language lessons and become fluent, it would be possible to involve them as people assisting integration of the newly arrived groups in the future.

These are some of the good practices where existing resources in the city have been well utilized in a creative manner to address the needs of resettled refugees in a way which does not require any new programmes to be established specifically for resettled refugees. Refugees are able to participate in existing programmes and there is a space for them to take their own initiative. While refugees’ access to formal education and language lessons would certainly need to be ensured, informal learning, as in the example above, equally offers great opportunities for refugees to establish their life in the new country. As many refugees talked about their dreams of taking lessons in hairdressing or wood

carving, the inclusion of refugees into existing vocational and skills training should further be sought.

#### Recommendations:

- Provide support to schools that accommodate resettled refugee children, to enable them to have extra teachers and interpreters to look after school activities of children.
- Expand access of resettled refugees to life-learning activities as well as vocational and skills training that are available in their localities. Compile information on what sort of activities and programmes are locally available and share it with refugees, with the advice on how to access such learning activities.
- Explore how building capacities and empowerment may be introduced in the programming and other activities, i.e., refugees themselves are encouraged to take initiative to organize activities which will cater to their needs.

### **Language training and integration**

From the outset while designing the pilot programme, the RoK Government emphasized the need for resettled refugees to master the Korean language as quickly as possible. International experiences prove that early investments providing resettled refugees with local language training pays off with reduced dependency on public assistance and increased tax contributions in the long-term.

Refugees undergo six months of Korean language lessons that follow the KIIP curriculum. As KIIP is the standard curriculum for foreigners, they are able to continue the lessons from where they left off at the IRC. Even after they move to the city and start working, the Government encourages the refugees to continue learning the language. The KIIP lessons offered at the nearby Global Center are free of charge and normally take place on Sundays. Moreover, the mentors assigned by the Incheon Immigration Office are principally intended to review refugees' homework for those Korean lessons. Two mentors are assigned for this purpose and they visit each assigned family alternately. Thanks to intensive support provided by RoK Government and to their own efforts, there are already some refugees who have reached the highest level 5.

There is also another important reason why the Government is keen in supporting their language lessons: in addition to the minimum five years of stay in RoK, the language proficiency (at level 5 or equivalent) is one of the requirements for naturalization. One would be exempted from a language exam if one possesses a certificate of completion at level 5. Thus, if refugees wish to acquire Korean citizenship, they would need a certificate attesting to their completion of level 5 of Korean language lessons.

The efforts made by the RoK Government to support refugees with language lessons at the beginning of the integration process and particularly beyond their stay at the IRC

should be highly commended. Language proficiency forms the core element for achieving integration into a new society. Very often, the language support is provided by the Government only for a limited period of time and the rest will be left to the will and resources of the refugees themselves. Without systematic support, refugees will soon become busy with work and daily chores, and will not be able to spend much time continuing to learn the language. Many refugees, after several years of staying in the new country, realize that they will not be able to get promoted in the work place, to acquire new skills, or to access useful information on resources that may be available in the local community, due to their lack of language skills.

In the interviews conducted, almost all the persons who directly or indirectly support the resettled refugees appeared to set the immediate and long-term goals at “becoming fluent in Korean.” The focus of the integration programme thus far has been to support their efforts in mastering the Korean language and it appeared that “integration” of refugees into Korean society is almost interchangeably used with “proficiency in Korean language.”

While continuing to support the development of their language skills, when assessing the progress of individual refugee’s progress in integration, this review suggests that in addition to the language focus, some additional elements of integration be looked into and developed further. In order to do so, the RoK Government and the relevant regional Immigration Offices involved in the resettlement programme would need to clearly set the goals of “what would constitute integration” and disseminate such goals to all stakeholders involved in supporting refugees, be it employers, teachers, mentors, or community leaders.

The role of the mentors would be particularly important in this regard. At the moment, it appears that the mentors understand their role to be helping refugees with the Korean language and with any difficulties that they encounter in daily life. All mentors have the passion to help “weak people” and help refugees with humanitarian spirit. Thus, they would not mind going to the refugee’s house, even at night, if refugees call and ask for help. Some of them visit the refugees and bring gifts whenever there is a celebration. All of this help comes from their heart and from their pockets. Their support in the initial period in Korea has tremendously helped refugees to feel at home and get past the challenges that arise in starting a new life in a very competitive market economy.

As a next step, with clearly set goals, the role of mentors could shift from the current focus to providing long-term advice and guidance: 1) to link resettled refugees with the local community and guide them on accessing available resources that may exist in the local community. This would mean that the mentors will support refugees’ efforts to identify and reach out to existing services and resources, instead of always finding the solution for them and providing the answers to the problem. 2) To support the process of realizing their personal aspirations in life, however small they may be.

It would also be useful to develop indicators against which the integration process of each refugee family be assessed. The indicators not only include the language proficiency but also their legal rights, children’s education, employment, lifelong learning, quality of

housing, family reunification, contacts with local community, participation in community socio-political affairs, keeping their culture and traditions, etc., as other resettlement countries use.<sup>16</sup>

The development of such indicators would also help the authorities in deciding when the services and support provided by the Government may be withdrawn. Moving ahead with a clear exit strategy will become increasingly important, as the RoK Government

*"I have reached Level 3 of Korean Language class. But the mentor told me that she would no longer be able to come as the contract was only for one year. My progress has slowed down since I have no more mentor coming to the house to help me with Korean homework. We need the mentor more as the lessons are more difficult now."*

- A male refugee

contemplates on regularization of the programme and the expansion of the number, criteria, and target groups. The government's resources would need to focus on the new arrivals, rather than continue providing similar support to the same families over several years. At the moment, the progress refugees have made in

integration seems to be largely measured against their Korean language levels. There are already some refugees who have been told that the mentors would not be able to support them any longer, as the initial engagement of the mentor was originally intended just to be one year. This refugee family mentioned that the support would be required more, as they move with their Korean lessons to an advanced level and the Korean language would become more difficult. They found it very unfortunate that the support was discontinued at this stage. Moreover, such decisions seem to be based once again on the sole criteria of language ability and not on the measurement of other factors for their progress in integration. The establishment of indicators would thus enable a more comprehensive assessment and a fair and transparent decision-making.

Among the resettled refugees, there are currently some who already seem to be caught in a vicious cycle: they work long hours, typically until 2000 or 2100 at night for six days a week, leaving virtually no time for language learning, not to mention family, leisure, or religious activities. They do not find sufficient time to study Korean, which consequently affects their chances for promotion at work.

Relating to the suggestion that this report has made earlier, the RoK Government may wish to consider various options of providing language training related to their prospective jobs: 1) the provision of language training in the workplace, 2) the language instruction tailored to enable resettled refugees to perform their job roles more effectively, or 3) the work-based language instruction offered to prospective employers where limited language proficiency may otherwise serve as a barrier to employing resettled refugees. Those programmes, particularly where it is tailored to the requirements of particular job roles can be highly effective, enabling refugees to acquire language skills that have

<sup>16</sup> There are abundant resources on such indicators which could provide basis for the development of indicators. See, for example, UNHCR's Refworld.

immediate application and meaning for them and which they have ongoing opportunities to practise in their job roles. Although this may not entirely end the above-mentioned cycle, this would at least contribute to better prospects for the advancement of resettled refugees within their workplace.

#### Recommendations:

- Consider providing language lessons that are directly related to the refugees' prospective jobs so as to enhance their adaptability to the work environment and performance in the jobs.
- While maintaining regular support for Korean language lessons for resettled refugees, develop a clear and broader set of indicators with which to assess the progress of integration of each refugee (and family).
- Share those indicators with all stakeholders directly involved in supporting the process of integration, to emphasize that their main role is to help support refugees' independence and support their long-term aspirations.
- Using those indicators, establish a clear exit strategy whereby the specific support offered by the Government should end.

#### **Contact with their own ethnic community**

During the interviews, refugees showed their eagerness to be close to each other, be it at work, finding their own accommodation, or participating in various activities. The gradual formation of a Karen community appears to be evolving around the resettled refugees with the help of some non-refugee Karens living in the same area. One is a Karen pastor who now holds church services for Christian refugees on Sundays. Another is a Karen lady who has been in the country for almost 20 years after she married a Korean national.

When the decision was made to resettle Karen refugees from Thailand, the RoK Government initiated a search to identify a suitable individual with a Karen ethnic background who could provide support to the resettled refugees. By then, there was a loose network of Karen in RoK, some of whom were staying in the country as migrant workers, some as asylum-seekers/refugees, and others as spouses of Korean citizens. A woman who had lived in Korea for many years, having married a Korean citizen, was identified. Initially, she was to act as an interpreter at the IRC, but her activities expanded to include accompanying refugees to hospitals and schools and assisting them in explaining the necessary administrative procedures, the Korean way of life, culture, and implicit rules that may exist in society.

In her own time, she eagerly organized Karen cultural events, such as a Karen New Year gathering and other celebrations, where not only the resettled refugees but also other Karen residing in Korea participated and intermingled with one another. These events



facilitated the contact between resettled refugees and those beyond their own circle. Moreover, she saw the importance of refugees having an opportunity to keep their own cultural identity, especially the Karen language. She started a Karen language school, involving a resettled refugee youth, to teach Karen language to younger children. This activity received support from Korean supporters, 'Eoulim Ikeulim' who provided a space for them to hold Karen language lessons on weekends and JUAN, who provided funds. While she receives some remuneration for her interpretation work, other activities that she initiates and organizes are all covered by her own personal finances. She eagerly wishes that a small space for children to gather be made available in the future, as children are often left to the care of older siblings at home when parents are at work for long hours.

Preserving the original cultural identity and the language will become more important as their stay in the resettlement country gets longer. The experiences in other countries show that as the children grow up and quickly adapt to the life in the new country and become fluent in the new language, many refugees experience communication gaps between the first generation refugees and the younger ones. Parents struggle to learn the new language because they are stuck in the vicious cycle of long work hours in low paid jobs which often precludes fluency in the local language. They eventually depend on the children to interpret for them. Children start to complain about the slow progress their parents make in acquiring the language skills. Children, on the other hand, do not speak their native language well. As the younger children grow to be adolescents and can barely communicate with their own parents, it could present serious problems.

The communication gap is felt very strongly by both generations when an important decision in life needs to be made, as they have difficulty in making themselves understood by each other. Learning from other practices elsewhere, it would be important to support the refugee families in keeping their traditions and practices so as to ease the communication between different generations and minimise any serious problems resulting from communication gap in the long run.

#### Recommendations:

- Provide increased support for activities that preserve refugees' own cultural identity and language, without hindering their smooth integration into the Korean society.
- Utilize the ethnic community more actively to promote self-reliance among resettled refugees, with the realization that refugees themselves could be empowered to become mentors to new refugee groups in the mid to long term.

#### **Social network and interaction**

Integration is a mutual, dynamic, multi-faceted, and on-going process. "From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of

the host society without having to lose one's own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a willingness for communities to be welcoming and responsive to refugees and for public institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population."<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned in this quote, the successful integration of refugees in resettlement countries is said to be a two-way street: refugees' willingness to adapt to the host community, and the receiving communities creating a welcoming environment.

This review has taken place three years after the initiation of the pilot resettlement programme in Korea. One year has passed since the first group has started to work and live in the city, and only four months have passed for the second group. The third group is still at the IRC. It may be too premature to conclude what types of social network they have built thus far with the Korean community. However, some trends appear to be emerging.

First, the existence of the resettlement programme does not appear to be widely known in Korea. Apart from concerned officials and supporters, the general public does not seem to be aware that the RoK Government is taking refugees in as part of their responsibility-sharing in the international community. While news articles appeared in the media whenever the refugees arrived in Korea, the Government does not seem to be actively disseminating the information on this programme so as to gain wider support from the people nationwide, but more so from the local community to prepare themselves to receive the refugees. This low-key approach is understandable in the current political context, where negative sentiments towards refugees are widespread, not only in Korea but also globally. This matter may also be related to the Government's wish to build successful cases first before widely publicizing the programme, as discussed in the chapter on selection criteria. Now that the pilot programme has largely been carried out successfully, it is high time to invest time and effort into disseminating and publicizing the programme. Without publicity on Korea's participation in resettlement or the awareness that refugees have been invited to build a new life in Korea and are making efforts to integrate into Korean society, refugees' integration will not reach its maximum potential and any attempts to expand the programme in the future may be prematurely curtailed.

Second, the resettled refugees' life centers around home, the work place, and language school, but not much beyond. They seem to communicate often among themselves and sometimes the larger Karen community but hardly interact with their Korean neighbourhood. The only contact points with Koreans are through the mentors assigned by the Immigration or by the Korean Red Cross Society. Some of them have visited the local District office to pay bills, but are accompanied by a mentor. They are not yet confident in going to the District office next time when they need to pay a bill. At least for male adults, they have some contacts with their colleagues and they chat and ask

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<sup>17</sup> UNHCR, "Refugee Resettlement: A International Handbook to guide reception and integration", 2002, Page 12

questions occasionally, but the refugees do not appear to seek advice on their personal matters from Korean employers and other colleagues. Rather, their relationship seems to be dry and does not go beyond the one between “employer-employee.”

Third, for working women, they have some interactions with their colleagues, but others who stay at home taking care of children will only go out to do grocery shopping in the neighbourhood. Not many of them have been actively interacting with Korean neighbours, as their communication is hampered by the lack of vocabulary, even if they wish to convey more than simple greetings. There was only one young wife who attended the local language class during weekdays and has made friends with other classmates through Korean. Her Korean has therefore improved progressively. Otherwise, many women are not aware of the existence of day care centers offered in their neighbourhood where they can go and meet with other mothers from different nationalities.

In addition to the lack of awareness on the part of refugees of existing resources that may be available within their reach, the awareness and the understanding of the resettlement programme among the general public, including the neighbourhood, for example, does not appear to have reached its maximum potential. Whenever a new group of resettled refugees arrives, the Government issues a press release, which often positively generates media attention, but there is little publicity of the programme beyond this. While striking a good balance between public information about resettlement, particularly why the RoK Government participates in resettlement and ensuring the privacy of the resettled refugees, it appears that the Government could do more to raise awareness and engage civil society and the general public.

The RoK Government is keenly aware of the necessity to create a welcoming environment, as the negative examples of a lack of social integration into the receiving community has resulted in social instability in other countries. They have initiated different approaches to this effect: first, they established a Resettlement Working Group, inviting other Ministries, concerned municipalities, NGOs, and UN agencies to discuss the support mechanism to resettled refugees and with a view to discussing the integration-related issues and also developing a wider network of support to refugees. Second, they have established a strong network of mentors/volunteers who would directly provide support to resettled refugees. Third, they are organizing various events, such as a musical play, to raise awareness, enhance understanding of refugee issues in general, and to demonstrate the efforts that resettled refugees are making in the Korean society, by inviting resettled refugees to perform in the play.

Building on those efforts, this review suggests that the Government invest in the following areas: first, it would be important to develop a communication/media strategy to enhance a broader understanding of the refugee experience in the general public and to raise awareness about the benefits of resettlement for both resettled and the receiving society. For this, the Government would be encouraged to work closely with the media, which has a powerful role in shaping community attitudes towards refugees and the resettlement programme. Second, it would be important to inform the receiving

community at the earliest stage of, or even preferably before their arrival and consult how and what kind of support each actor could provide in this regard.

One issue that needs to be highlighted, however, is the specific protection consideration for refugees. It was noticed during the interviews with different supporters that the specific situation surrounding refugees, such as why refugees need to be protected and how they are different from other migrant workers, was not well understood by many. Mentors, employers and school teachers who have daily contact with refugees unanimously expressed their wish to receive such a briefing. For those who are to provide direct support to refugees, it would be important for appropriate information and explanation to be provided to them, so that they may understand the specific protection needs of refugees.

Recommendations:

- Develop a communication / media strategy to enhance broader understanding of the refugee experience in the general public.
- Raise awareness about resettlement and the benefits thereof for both resettled refugees and the receiving society.
- Provide general information on refugees and why they need to be protected and what is the role played by the RoK Government in this regard to all the stakeholders who are involved in supporting refugees, as well as specific protection consideration that may be required to protect their identity.

## **VII. Long-term planning/future**

The author was initially informed that it would be very difficult to extract the personal viewpoints from the resettled refugees, as Karens are known to be reserved and are not used to expressing their opinion to strangers. As an example, Karen refugees did not decline any offers in terms of what types of job they were to be engaged in. Apart from the fact that they were aware that they needed to become financially stable and self-reliant to take care of the family because state assistance would only be provided by the RoK Government in the first year, their only wish was to be with other refugees whom they arrived with in Korea. However, as the author's conversation with refugee families went on, it soon became apparent that some refugees had clear aspirations and knew what kind of work they would like to seek in the long term.

It is understandable that with the limited educational background (many of them have attained only the lower grade of primary education) and work experience as well as limited Korean language proficiency, the range of employment that they could be initially engaged in would be limited. The priority therefore would be that they find a job and be financially independent, with the hope that they will, in the future, get a promotion or find a job that they would be more interested in, as their proficiency in the Korean language

improves. However, it would still be important to keep the full information in mind, including their past work experiences and aspirations when searching for suitable employment for each refugee and also to guide them in their future planning.

This point is also relevant to the fact that resettled refugees hardly have the time to relax and spend time with the family or for themselves. For example, all the men are at work from early morning till 2100 or 2200 at night. Many of them eat dinner at the factory, if they are to work overtime. And they do work overtime, as they are not able to support the family unless they earn extra money. On Saturdays, they also work but not overtime. They then have Korean language lessons at home until 2100, supported by a mentor. On Sundays, Christians go to a service early in the morning, followed by another Korean language lesson at the Global Center, which ends only at 1800 in the evening. Thus, for men, they hardly see their children except for several hours during the weekend. Any matters relating to the communication with school are left to the wife, if she is staying at

*“Korean lessons are already taking a lot of time and I hardly have time to do other things. But I would like to learn hairdressing, as I have always been fascinated to do hair for others. I hope that someday I will be able to have time to learn.”*

-A female refugee

home. When asked if their schedule is not too tight, the majority of refugees mentioned that this is the life in Korea and that they have to take it, otherwise there is no other choice to survive in Korea. However, such a tight schedule may in fact prevent them from having the time to explore the neighbourhood, to talk to the neighbours, to go somewhere on their own, or to have relaxed time with their family. They may even be deprived of going through a “trial and error” process of learning how to live in Korea.

In fact, it has been pointed out that the life of most Koreans is quite similar. It is considered quite normal that in Korea, people aspire to study after work or on weekends to upgrade their knowledge and brush up their skills. It is not easy to find a job after graduation from university and you will be lucky if you find one. Refugees are considered the lucky ones and they are expected to master the Korean language as quickly as possible so that they will be able to be engaged in more highly paid jobs, and pursue their personal dreams.

For those who have older children (late teens), their lives may become easier more quickly once those children get a job. However, for those with children that are still young, they do not seem to have any immediate hopes of getting out of the current situation and enjoying life as they wish. They constantly worry about their financial situation and their lack of progress in the Korean language.

This review suggests that long-term life-planning be initiated and the support system be developed through appropriate case management from the very beginning of the programme for each individual. In fact, as the IRC staff is already part of the selection mission, which provides a great opportunity to gather information on each individual's educational background and employment records in the country of asylum as well as

*"I was trained in engraving but it was long time ago. I loved it and I would like to continue it in the future."*

- A male refugee

*"I used to work as an agricultural supervisor for an NGO in the refugee camp in Thailand. My wife used to make candles and soaps. I would like to use my past experience and knowledge and work in the agricultural sector, too."*

- A refugee couple

his/her aspirations. For example, one of the refugees who was the leader in an agricultural co-op in the refugee camp wishes to work in the agriculture sector in the future. His wife was also engaged in soap and candle making in the refugee camp. Such information could be taken into account when discussing what they wish to achieve in life and what types of support they may require, if they still wish to be engaged in a similar kind of work based on their past experiences. While the groups that have so far been resettled in Korea have not had much opportunity to pursue education or work

while in the country of asylum, it will become more relevant if the programme is expanded and people with different educational/work experiences are to be admitted to the country.

Needless to say, the case management system needs to go hand in hand with the development of a clear set of indicators for integration and an exit strategy (see the previous chapter on "Language Training and Integration"). With the limited human and financial resources available, the Government (and other supporters at the local level) would not be able to continuously follow up on the welfare of individual cases. As in many other countries, the standard duration of initial (and intensive) support may be set in the beginning and support gradually withdrawn according to the individual's progress, which will be assessed against the indicators. Refugees may then approach authorities / supporting NGOs only when they encounter problems that they are unable to solve on their own.

Indeed, there is already a good example: with the collective support provided, a refugee is pursuing her dream to become a nurse. This young female refugee, when she arrived in Korea, clearly articulated her desire to become a nurse to the immigration officials and her supporters. She was

*"I am not a Korean but I can now help them now. I am very proud and am filled with joy everytime I see the smile of elderly people I am caring."*

- A female refugee student

initially counselled to work as others so as to support the family. However, her determination and persistence to pursue her dream has gradually persuaded the people around her. The Incheon Immigration Bureau then referred her to a nursing school where

she studies and has gained access to internship at a nursing home for old people, thanks to the help of a mentor. She excels in the Korean language class and has already reached the highest level. “When I first started at the nursing school, the subjects were really hard and I was very discouraged. But my Korean friends and the class teacher have constantly encouraged me not to give up and cheered me up every time I was facing hurdles. At the nursing home where I am doing an internship, for the first 2-3 days, I almost gave up as communicating with the patients and other nurses in the Korean language was very difficult. But now, the old people are accepting me and happy with me. When I hear the patients say “Thank you”, I feel most satisfied and fulfilled.”

There were also refugees who expressed interest in acquiring skills in hairdressing or wood carving. Many of them expressed interest in attending vocational school to acquire or improve skills. It will also enable them to adjust their skills to the Korean market. With such a long-term planning for which they are encouraged to improve their Korean language, they may be more motivated to study and work for extra hours, rather than accept it as their obligation to the RoK Government and to the family.

For longer-term prospects, many refugees expressed their desire to become naturalized. Others mentioned that they would like to consider such a possibility in the long term. They, however, do not know exactly what is required to become a Korean citizen. They vaguely understand that the Korean language is one of the requirements and that is also why they have to study hard, more than what they have mastered so far. It would be useful to make the information on naturalization readily available in writing and also to disseminate it among mentors, so that their future aspirations may be discussed at home and with the supporters as they proceed with the preparations.

In addition, several families enquired about the possibility of travelling abroad, the procedure to purchase a house, and how to take loans from a bank during the interview. It would be useful to take relevant information and share it with all on such issues of common interest. There was a concern that the resettled refugees may have received wrong information on the rental deposit scheme provided by the Government. In order to provide accurate information, the RoK Government is planning to organize information sessions, starting from 2018, on specific topics such as naturalization. Those sessions will be open not only to resettled refugees but also to all refugees and humanitarian status holders, which is a very welcome development.

Lastly, it would also be important that the assistance and support made available to resettled refugees, Convention refugees, and humanitarian status holders be aligned in order not to create the sense of favouritism among persons with different status. At the moment, it seems that the resettled refugees are regarded as a privileged group, which the Government invests significant resources in supporting them to become self-reliant. Whatever the manner they arrived, the circumstances surrounding those persons are the same, in that they have a fear of returning to their country of origin and they must all be protected and their integration supported.

One of the urgent matters to be dealt with would be to facilitate family reunification of those given status in Korea. Family reunification is one of the most important human rights principles that refugees should enjoy (please see Part II on discussion on family reunification.)

#### Recommendations:

- Initiate life planning from the beginning of the resettlement process, gathering full information of each individual refugee including his/her work experience and aspiration for life.
- Ease the emphasis on refugees mastering the Korean language as soon as possible and rather adjust the current programme to allow the real life learning.
- Introduce case management system to monitor and follow up each refugee's integration progress vis-à-vis their lifetime goals.
- Introduce broader and earlier engagement of settlement cities and involve the local District Offices to make more effective use of resources and to encourage broader support for the resettlement programme.
- Support refugees' desire to acquire / improve their skills, by facilitating access to vocational and other skills training courses.
- Provide necessary information on naturalization and procedures as well as other issues of interest to refugees such as how to travel abroad, how to take loans from a bank etc.
- Align the assistance and support provided to individuals with different status., i.e., resettled refugees, Convention refugees and humanitarian status holders, to make these uniform and standardized.
- Develop necessary mechanism to facilitate family reunification of refugees (including resettled refugees) and humanitarian status holders.

### **VIII. Monitoring, coordination, and looking forward**

Once refugees arrive at the IRC, the coordinator interviews each family member and becomes familiar with the history and profile of each refugee. This is the time that the coordinator may find out the specific medical history of some refugees, although major health issues would normally have been identified during the pre-departure medical check-up before their arrival to Korea. If there is a need to follow up with medical clinic, the coordinator also arranges a visit.

The information that the IRC staff gather from refugees is compiled into a database, which is commonly shared with the headquarters of Korea Immigration Service. With this system, therefore, the information on refugees' background, their progress in their Korean language lessons, their activities at the IRC, and their well-being (including the records of vaccination medical history) are all shared with the KIS HQs and the Incheon



Immigration Bureau, which covers the local area in which refugees will eventually be living, to ensure a smooth transition.

When refugees move out of the IRC and settle down in a city, the above information is made available at the Incheon Immigration Office, as the transfer and sharing of information within the same Ministry is easily facilitated. The Incheon Immigration Office does not need to interview each family all over again, which results in more efficient processing.

To monitor the activities of the mentors and to provide appropriate advice, the Incheon Immigration Office created an online net café that can be accessed by only authorized people: MoJ and Incheon Immigration staff associated with the pilot resettlement programme and mentors. All the mentors will put up a short report on their visit to the assigned family, with photos of their activities (such as cooking, celebrations, etc.). Moreover, whenever a mentor faces a challenge where s/he has no answer to the questions raised by a refugee or needs specific information, this is where those questions are posted and whoever has the answer or suggestions could reply. Through this network, the Incheon Immigration Office greatly enhanced information-sharing among supporters, facilitated immediate responses to the challenge faced by refugees, and enabled coherent approaches among different mentors. From the Immigration Office's point of view, utilization of such a network resulted in efficient and economical monitoring of the wellbeing of refugees, as they had limited human resources for personal visits and meetings with each family.

In addition to daily/weekly reporting, mentors are also required to submit a monthly report. The Incheon Immigration Office also organizes meetings every three months with those mentors to share information and discuss common issues.

As for monitoring, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, this review suggests that the RoK Government introduces a case management system with a particular focus on making a long-term planning of each refugee and family with a view to providing appropriate guidance throughout the integration process, taking into consideration all the available information (education, work experiences, medical history, and aspirations in life).

For the mentors assigned by the Incheon Immigration Office, one of the issues raised was related to the coordination mechanism among different actors. At the moment, their link is with the Incheon Immigration Office and with other mentors. However, refugees also receive other types of assistance from different actors, such as the Korean Red Cross Society, other NGOs and Foundations. While mentors are mainly expected to help refugees with Korean language lessons, as they are also consulted on other issues, they tend to assist in their own capacity, by purchasing some items that the family may need. In such a situation, duplications and gaps sometimes occur.

In order to avoid the situation of “the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing,” it may be useful to establish a coordination mechanism at the local level in the future, different from the Resettlement Working Group, which has been established at the

central level. In that context, easy sharing of information and updates among key actors through a online information sharing platform, which shows what types of assistance was provided by whom, when, where, and how much to a concerned refugee family would help reduce the duplications and the gaps. Such a mechanism will facilitate better coordination, particularly if a much bigger caseload is to be assisted and monitored while the support network is broadened and many more actors involved.

Thinking about the longer-term prospect, all the individuals interviewed were positive about the RoK Government continuing the resettlement programme with expansion of criteria and target groups and making it a formal undertaking. Throughout the review, however, many interlocutors pointed out that for this programme to continue and expand, the involvement of other actors is a must, without which an effective support system will not be able to be developed. To date, the Ministry of Justice has been the primary actor to plan and implement the resettlement programme. However, because of their strong leadership, somehow other actors may have shied away from being more forthcoming and providing the expertise and the resources that they may possess. The ownership building of other ministries, municipalities, NGOs, schools, employers, faith groups, etc. may now need to be more actively considered.

The Ministry of Justice is certainly aware of this and from the early stage of the pilot programme, they established a Resettlement Working Group and invited different ministries, NGOs, and international organizations. Once the first group moved to Bupyeong, the District office, Incheon Immigration Bureau participated in the meetings. It would be useful to maximize the existing Working Group and utilize it to discuss a number of policy-related issues that concern social and economic integration of resettled refugees. As a first step, the Working Group would be a useful forum to discuss the actions that need to be taken and designate which stakeholder (a particular Ministry, Municipality, NGOs, etc.) should take responsibility of ensuring that the tasks are accomplished. For example, the recognition of a refugee's certification of education/professional skills obtained in their country of origin is an issue that will fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. Hygiene-related issues are normally dealt with and regulated by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. There are also several asylum NGOs that are keen to provide integration support, too. The Government has already tapped into their resources and involved them in the assessment of services. At the moment, however, their expertise and knowledge seems to be underutilized. As some of asylum NGOs may wish to maintain their independence, a programme-based agreement may be considered with clear Terms of Reference (ToR) specifying objectives, expected outcomes, and outputs. Perhaps more importantly, other local NGOs that are currently assisting migrant workers and their families may offer relevant support for resettled refugees, as in the case of Incheon. They are already familiar with the challenges that newly arrived foreign nationals would encounter in a new country and offer a variety of programmes and services, which would also cater to the needs of refugees.

Most importantly, matters relating to the daily life of people are covered by the host municipality, such as how to sort and dispose of garbage properly, where to pay electric

bills, etc. Given the presence of other foreign residents, the host municipalities often organize different types of activities to help them get acquainted with the way of life in Korea. There may also be daycare centers where young mothers can bring their babies and meet with other mothers. The available resources may vary from one municipality to another. Mapping exercises involving the concerned municipality from the beginning would become crucial.

The advantage of RoK is that there are already existing networks and corresponding programmes for multicultural families and migrant workers. It would not be necessary to create a new and separate entity or network meeting the needs of resettled refugees, but rather the focus should be on how to include refugees in those programmes. The role of the Government would not be to execute each and every integration programme, but rather to coordinate the efforts of different actors and streamline them by providing necessary funds for each actor to work effectively. Incheon would be a good model to replicate, with appropriate level of human and financial resources made available.

As to the future of the programme, the question seems not to be IF the Government should continue or not, but HOW. The most encouraging fact of all is that the resettled refugees feel that they made the right decision in coming to the Republic of Korea, and they are generally happy with their life, despite the hard work and tight schedules. Being completely new to resettlement, the Government has shown its commitment and determination to make this programme a successful endeavour. As the pilot phase is coming to an end, should the Government make a decision to continue with the programme, the most important considerations are commitment at the highest level, reaffirmation that this programme is part of Korea's expression of international responsibility-sharing, and sharing such a policy with the wider public. As any other undertaking, the resettlement programme requires a stable foundation and solid, wide public support. Such support will only be realized through the active involvement of willing companies, academic institutions, and ordinary citizens.

This review has looked at the RoK's pilot resettlement programme, extracted the key lessons, and made suggestions for adaptations and improvements to ensure the sustainability of the programme. The Republic of Korea has proven that it has the commitment, the capacity and the resources to make a larger contribution to resettlement. When the world is facing an unprecedented magnitude of displacement, the contribution the RoK has made to date in offering an invaluable tool of protection to those in need is clearly an expression of international solidarity and responsibility-sharing. The author hopes that this report will contribute to further discussion on the future of this programme, which is believed to have great potential for regularization and expansion.

#### Recommendations:

- Make use of the existing Resettlement Working Group to discuss substantive issues relating to social and economic integration of refugees with the

involvement of different Ministries, concerned Municipalities, and relevant NGOs. As a start, the Working Group may be tasked to map out the existing programmes that are offered by different Ministries, Municipalities, NGOs, and where refugees may be included. This Working Group could also be utilized to monitor the progress on the integration programmes and ensure the accomplishment of tasks by different actors.

- Establish a coordination mechanism at the local level among all relevant actors and service providers to avoid or minimize any potential gaps and duplications.
- Introduce broader and earlier engagement of settlement cities involving local District Offices to make more effective use of resources and to encourage broader support for the resettlement programme.
- Engage willing and competent NGOs more actively in the service provision, particularly those local NGOs which provide a variety of programmes and services for migrant workers as well as foreign-born spouses of international marriages.

## Annex I

### Study questions

#### 1. Planning and preparation

- Were the objectives of the resettlement programme clear to all the interlocutors involved in designing the programme and developing an integration strategy for resettled refugees?
- To what extent was effective collaboration and cooperation ensured between the relevant players (Government entities, municipalities, civil society, refugee communities and UNHCR) for the development and implementation of the programme?
- Was the division of roles and responsibilities clear to all the stakeholders?
- Was communication and coordination between the central Government, the municipalities and the entity implementing the programme effective and efficient?
- To what extent were campaigns / preparations carried out with the receiving community to support the arrival and integration of the refugees?
- Were the human and financial resources necessary for the programme implementation made available? By whom? (Governments, Civil Society, UNHCR)?

#### 2. Implementation

- How many refugees were resettled? What is the profile of these refugees?
- Was the programme implemented according to the agreed plan of action and programme specifications?
- To what extent UNHCR's selection criteria were used by the Korean government in the selection of refugees ?
- To what extent the reception arrangements provided in the Immigration Reception Center (including the length of stay and the orientation) matched the actual needs of resettled refugees to facilitate their integration in the society ?
- To what extent support provided to refugees after departing the centre (including housing arrangements, support for employment and schooling for children) matched the needs of resettled refugees ?
  - Do the resettled refugees feel safe, secure and comfortable in their new homes and communities ?
  - Are families largely able to meet their own economic needs ? If not, are they able to access the support available to other low-income residents in their communities ?
  - Do the resettled refugees participate in local cultural, recreational and community events ?
  - Are they able to uphold their own cultural traditions ? Do they feel socially accepted in their new communities ?
  - Are the resettled refugees aware of the requirements to become Korean citizens ? Do they feel that they will be able to meet them ?

- Do the resettled refugees feel that the integration strategy was adapted to meet their own specific needs ? Were they able to influence the decisions regarding their futures ?
- Was the implementation strategy sufficiently flexible to adapt to the challenges as they arose during the execution of the programme and the changing needs of refugees?

- What were the costs for the programme? Was the implementation efficient in terms of costs?

- What (human and financial) resources were used to execute the resettlement programme and who were involved ?

### 3. Monitoring

- Were monitoring mechanisms / methodologies / criteria established from the start of the programme?

- How clear and effective were they ?

- To what extent did the findings feed into the implementation of the programme ?

### 4. Sustainability of the programme and future direction

- Is there a long term political vision for the integration and naturalization of resettled refugees?

- What positive and negative lessons were learned by Governments, UNHCR and partner agencies that should be taken into consideration for a future programme?

- To what extent the resettlement programme addressed the needs of resettled people in terms of protection and lasting solutions?

- What impact has the resettlement programme had on the country's asylum policies and attention provided to refugees that arrived spontaneously?

- To what extent is the current programme sustainable? Are resources available to continue / expand the resettlement programme?

- To what extent is there willingness to initiate different complementary pathways programmes in South Korea and what are the potential resources that Korean Government may tap on ?

## PART II

### Towards the expansion of the resettlement programme and consideration for other possible complementary pathways

Part I of this report looks at the RoK Government's pilot resettlement programme by reviewing its operations and extracting lessons learned. It presents recommendations to develop the pilot programme and expand it not only into a more sustainable endeavour, but a more effective one.

Based on the review, the author believes that the RoK Government is strongly committed to continuing the resettlement programme and transforming it into a more regular programme, and that the Government is well equipped and sufficiently resourced to achieve this.

PART II of the report will therefore look into various elements that need to be taken into account for regularization and expansion of the resettlement programme as well as different options to be considered by the RoK Government for other possible pathways.

#### I. Establishing a regular resettlement programme

From the interviews the author conducted, the government officials appeared to be very committed to regularizing the resettlement programme from 2018 and that a decision is soon to be taken in that regard.

If such a decision will indeed be taken by the RoK Government, it will be very much welcomed by the international community, particularly because less than one percent of the entire refugee populations have access to third country resettlement. RoK's desire to expand the target groups and increase the annual quota will significantly contribute to the protection of refugees worldwide and reduce the burdens shouldered by the countries of first asylum. Such a decision will also be seen as an exemplary expression of international solidarity and responsibility-sharing.

Likewise, national NGOs in general expressed their support for the government to make a decision in regularizing and expanding the programme from 2018, and were keen to provide support in areas of their expertise.

For the expansion of the programme, it would be important that the Government consider aligning its selection criteria based on the global needs and the universally accepted criteria of UNHCR, which places emphasis on protection risks and vulnerabilities based on age, gender, and diversity.

Outside the resettlement quota, one of the issues that needs to be considered as a matter of priority is family reunification of those who have been resettled or those who are already in RoK as refugees or with humanitarian/protected status. On family reunification, whereas Article 37 refers to the possibility of spouse and minor children of a recognized

refugee being granted permission to enter the country<sup>18</sup>, the author understands that the actual procedures to realize family members joining the concerned Convention refugees or resettled refugees are yet to be developed. Article 37 does not apply to those with humanitarian status either. In reality, family members wishing to join the concerned refugee need to arrange their transportation, travel document, visas, etc., to travel to RoK and submit their application only after their arrival in the country.

During the interviews, many resettled refugees expressed their wish to bring their family members. Many, however, also mentioned that those family members are not registered with the Thai authorities. As the processing of group resettlement has already been closed and the individual resettlement consideration is only open for those who are registered as refugees with Thai authorities, the possibility of their family members joining resettled refugees in RoK appears to be, under the present circumstances, very small. Nonetheless, in the normal circumstances, for example, bringing grandparents to take care of small children in the family would provide a viable solution to the lack of daycare arrangements for the couple, as it would enable both parents to be engaged in gainful employment.

Nevertheless, it is considered crucially important to establish an appropriate procedure for family reunification, not only for resettled refugees and Convention refugees but also for humanitarian status holders, as preservation of family unity is recognized as one of the most fundamental human rights.

Exploring the possibility of family reunification would be particularly relevant in relation to Syrian refugees/humanitarian status holders in RoK. There are already several hundred Syrians in the RoK who have been granted protected status and most of those Syrian refugees/humanitarian status holders are able-bodied men whose spouses, and possibly children, in the neighbouring countries near Syria as refugees. Separated due to the conflict and not knowing their conditions, those persons constantly worry about the safety of their parents, siblings, spouse, and children. Facilitating family reunification of those who are already present in the RoK may represent one of the easiest humanitarian gestures that the RoK could offer.

In order to explore the possibility of facilitating family reunification of those Syrians, as a first step, it is suggested that the RoK Government carries out a mapping exercise, as was done in Japan, to gauge the size of the Syrian population who are registered as refugees/humanitarian status holders and who wish to bring their family members, and at the same time, gather information on the family members' details. Such information will allow the RoK Government to assess the interest and the needs of Syrian refugees/humanitarian status holders for family reunification and to develop the course of necessary actions.

## II. Other admission programmes

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<sup>18</sup> Article 37 of the Refugee Act stipulates: (1) The Minister of Justice shall, upon request, permit the entry into the country of the spouse and minor children of a recognized refugee, provided that Article 11 of the Immigration Control Act does not apply to such persons. (2) The definition of spouse and minor children in paragraph 1 shall follow the definition contained in the Civil Act.



In the context of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, which has resulted in one of the worst humanitarian and displacement crises in decades, UNHCR called on the States to explore means of providing safe and secure new homes for at least ten percent of the Syrian refugee population<sup>19</sup>, particularly because of vulnerabilities. Survivors of torture, refugees with serious medical conditions, or women left alone with several children to care for and without family support are among others considered acutely in need of resettlement or other humanitarian admission.

In response, some 30 countries have generously made humanitarian pathways for admission thus far. It included resettlement/humanitarian admission, humanitarian visas, private sponsorship, medical evacuation, and additional pathways. Admission of relatives, labour mobility schemes, academic scholarships, and apprenticeship programmes are some of the examples that the countries explored as additional pathways. As of the end of April 2017, more than 250,000 Syrian refugees have benefitted from those programmes.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from resettlement, which is the traditional procedure through which UNHCR identifies and assists refugees with specific needs and vulnerabilities to move from host country to a third country, there are other programmes other countries have thus far explored and may also be favourably considered by the RoK Government. These programmes are discussed below.

### 1) Academic Scholarships, Study and Apprenticeship Programmes

Academic scholarships, study and apprenticeship programmes provide a mechanism for eligible Syrian refugees to study or to continue their education or vocational training.

In countries such as Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Japan, the programmes involve universities or polytechnic institutions, governments, and civil society working together to develop and fund relevant arrangements.

As a country that places high importance on education, RoK is well suited to initiate a similar programme. This programme also appears to have a higher chance of acceptance by the general host public. Building the capacity of refugees when their home country is in turmoil and the expectation that they may be able to contribute to the nation-building of a new Syria once the conflict is over may receive positive public support in general.

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<sup>19</sup> As of November 2017, approximately 5.3 million Syrians have crossed borders and became refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The exhaustion of personal resources, the deterioration of living conditions in those countries after five years of conflict, many Syrian refugees moved further afield, particularly to Europe. Also see UNHCR, "Background Note" for the high-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees, 30 March 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/56a628619.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> UNHCR, "Resettlement and other admission pathways for Syrian refugees", [http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/573dc82d4/resettlement-other-admission-pathways-syrian-refugees.html?query=humanitarian pathways](http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/573dc82d4/resettlement-other-admission-pathways-syrian-refugees.html?query=humanitarian%20pathways)

As in the case of Japan, the fellowship programmes KOICA provides under CIAT (Capacity Improvement and Advancement for Tomorrow) to its partner countries cover a range of training programmes (short training courses to multi-year professional courses, such as one aiming at acquiring a masters' degree) and more than 5,000 individuals from different countries participate in more than 300 courses. With the existing infrastructure and the expertise KOICA already has in possession, developing a similar scholarship programme such as the one in Japan, in cooperation with willing academic institutions may be an option.

Learning from the experiences of a similar scholarship programme in Japan, it would be important to take into consideration the following issues when developing such a programme in RoK:

- It should be noted that this programme was announced at the G7 Summit in 2016 in Japan as a commitment of international responsibility-sharing at the highest political level. It would be good if a strong leadership/commitment could be secured at a similar level so as to form a solid foundation for such a programme.
- Such a political commitment may then be followed by a cooperation agreement between RoK and UNHCR on the implementation of the scholarship programme, highlighting the protection aspect, in particular, the non-refoulement principle (this would be particularly relevant when their study is completed and their study visa becomes invalid), the participating refugees' right to seek asylum, the assurance of participants' rights as accorded to recognized refugees in RoK.
- Appropriate consideration needs to be given to the specific challenges that face refugees, including lack of documentation and academic certificates.
- Six months to one year Korean language lessons to precede the academic courses for the resettled refugees and for them to continue taking lessons even after they start university classes, even where they are studying in English medium of instruction.
- Possible support needs to be accorded to participating refugees to seek employment opportunities upon completion of the academic/apprentice programme.
- Possibility of bringing family members and the support provision to them, including access to Korean language lessons.
- Readmission to the first countries of asylum is not a possibility due to the prevailing circumstances in those countries. Thus they are not expected to depart RoK unless they can safely return to Syria or find other legal opportunities to move to a third country.

## 2) Medical evacuation

Medical evacuation programmes may facilitate the admission of refugees with medical needs as part of resettlement, humanitarian admission, humanitarian visa, or other programmes. Medical evacuation also presents a possible option, given the high standard

medical facilities and treatment in RoK, which may be made available to those who are suffering from injuries and diseases for which the treatment is not available in the current country of asylum. The admission of those with urgent and serious medical conditions is also a concrete expression of responsibility-sharing with host countries. It would be important that their families are also allowed to accompany the patient, as they will form a key source of support.

### 3) Labour Mobility schemes

Labour mobility opportunities provide the authorized onward movement of Syrian refugees to third countries to pursue employment. They may form part of traditional migration channels or may be established specifically for Syrian refugees. Access to employment facilitates the re-establishment of a normal life following displacement, and helps refugees to live in dignity and attain an adequate standard of living. Work also provides refugees with the possibility of contributing to the development of their host country and community, as well as to their country of origin. If strategically planned and managed, labour mobility schemes can help States meet their labour market needs and foster innovation and skills transfers.<sup>21</sup>

This scheme also has potential, given the shortage of labour in various industrial sectors in RoK. It appears that many Syrian refugees/humanitarian status holders in RoK are engaged in service industry, such as auto parts, construction, metal work, etc. Given their general educational background, however, there may be other sectors that Syrians may wish to find employment, such as in the IT industry. In whatever sectors they may be working, a certain period of on-the-job training would be useful for them to learn the language and become familiarized with the tasks involved.

In establishing such schemes, the RoK Government would also need to ensure that the potential employers fully understand the Syrian refugees' specific situation (e.g., lack of documentation, the need for accreditation of their qualifications, or fear of exploitation, fear of loss of work and thus legal residency). They would also need to understand the differences between ordinary migrant workers and refugees.

### 4) Private sponsorship

A private sponsorship programme draws on private and community resources to enable refugees to be resettled with the support of private citizens, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or other interested groups, such as local authorities or faith-based groups. Under this programme, refugee applicants are, in principle, identified directly by

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<sup>21</sup> UNHCR, "Background Note" for the high-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees, op.cit.

their sponsors. The sponsors may take responsibility for some of the costs associated with resettlement, reception, and integration support in the community.<sup>22</sup>

As in many cases, the programme bases its success on the willingness and the commitment of civil society organizations and individuals. Implemented alongside or in conjunction with a government resettlement programme, the goodwill of citizens has helped a number of refugees and their families move to third countries and thus helped to tackle the growing number of refugees worldwide.

During a very brief stay in the RoK, the author did not feel that there existed strong and outpouring initiatives on the part of the civil society. Those who are aware of the resettlement programme generally welcome the RoK Government's initiative and support its possible expansion. But none of them expressed any enthusiasm to take the initiative to bring a refugee to Korea and or sponsor a refugee in Korea. Private sponsorship requires financial, institutional, and human resources, which they often lack, and the sponsors need to shoulder significant responsibility in ensuring the well-being of the concerned individuals. While this does not necessarily mean that there is no potential for such a programme, the first step would need to be taken to identify whether there are any such willing groups of people, and explore what resources each sponsor may be able to bring to realize the programme. As a number of mentors, NGOs, and other supporters seem to be affiliated with church groups, this may be the area to explore and identify whether such an interest exists.

For example, one NGO in Japan initiated a private sponsorship (cum scholarship) programme for Syrian refugees. While consulting the relevant government ministries on the legal status of those incoming refugees, the NGO managed to mobilize other organizations that were interested in supporting them but were undecided as to how to go about doing that. The sponsorship programme materialized as a result, with the help of Japanese language schools (waiver of tuition fees) and a network of faith-based organizations (initial orientation and provision of daily support). This may serve as a good example of how the consolidation of different actors' interest would enable the establishment of a sponsorship programme.

In the case of the RoK, the well-functioning mentor system seems to have a potential to develop into a community-based sponsorship programme. There were individuals among mentors and NGO representatives who are very committed to supporting the programme but were unaware that they could take an initiative to invite and support the integration of a refugee (and his/her family), through a community-based sponsorship programme. At the Incheon level, the Incheon Immigration Office solicited the support from the members of the Integration Policy Committee, whenever the financial needs arose. To date, they managed to find resources through this network. There seems to be a potential that a willing group of people, backed up with financial resources may be able to initiate

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

such a programme in the future. Perhaps it is the matter of identifying where such interest lies, consolidating them and developing into a programme.

#### 5) The need for increased awareness raising

While great potential seems to exist in implementing different schemes of complementary pathways, initiating many of these schemes are dependent on the willingness of different actors in the civil society, such as hospitals, academic institutions, companies, faith-groups, or individual citizens to participate. Such willingness may not develop overnight unless there is an appropriate strategy to create a welcoming and hospitable environment. Only when the wider community is convinced that the current displacement issue is not only the responsibility of neighbouring countries where human rights violation or conflicts are taking place, but also a collective responsibility of the international community to provide protection to refugees, they will be motivated to initiate and participate in such an action.

UNHCR's "An International Handbook on reception and integration"<sup>23</sup> provides useful resources and guidance on how to build welcoming and hospitable communities. Among others, the Government may wish to consider prioritizing the following:

- Reach out to more actors and involve them in designing/implementing integration support programmes, such as District offices, faith-based communities, existing NGOs that provide support to a larger community of migrants etc.
- Provide information to community leaders and opinion setters in the cities of settlement with a view to promoting tolerance and understanding of refugee issues as well as seeking their collaboration and support.
- Support cultural events and special days to educate the wider community to accommodate the values, beliefs, and practices of newcomers and also for refugees to learn about the cultural practices of the receiving community.
- Integrate the promotion of admission and acceptance of refugees in the community into the larger efforts to counter racism and xenophobia.
- Promote awareness-raising and understanding of refugee issues and refugee resettlement in the media.
- Initiate a mapping/scoping exercise to gauge the interest of the civil society, with a view to identifying possible sponsoring programmes and in what form.

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=search&docid=405189284&skip=0&query=international handbook on reception and integration](http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=search&docid=405189284&skip=0&query=international%20handbook%20on%20reception%20and%20integration)